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Ben Gallan

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'Mild-mannered bistro by day, eclectic freak-land at night' The Oxford Tavern as Heterotopia and Cultural Asset

Abstract

In an era in which regional planning is increasingly influenced by a creative cities agenda cultural infrastructure is becoming increasingly relevant. While creative city planning and debates about cultural infrastructure are in their infancy it is timely to critically assess how infrastructure is connected to cultural practices. Focussing on the Oxford Tavern, a pub and music venue in the city of Wollongong, this thesis introduces heterotopic space as neglected sites of social and cultural significance. This thesis aims to: 1. document how participants describe their experiences of participation in a local scene; 2. analyse the relationship between a music venue and a music scene; and 3. theorise how the Oxford can be understood as a cultural asset for Wollongong. In doing so, this thesis critically positions the Oxford within academic and policy discourses of creative cities and cultural infrastructure.

For the researcher, on-going participation in the music scene of the Oxford was an overarching influence for the development of this project - as such participant observation contributes to the methodological approach. This was accompanied by utilising qualitative methods of interviews, oral histories, photographs-as-prompts and discourse analysis.

The findings of the thesis are structured around three results chapters: The first documents the participants' experiences in the scene of the Oxford. The second discusses ways in which participants articulated the scene's relationship to the material structure or space of the pub. The third discusses constructions of 'local' evident in participants' narratives, and what this means for creativity and culture in Wollongong. The results are synthesized through a discussion chapter of how the Oxford's scene and venue relates to the cultural infrastructure debate in Wollongong.

Key conclusions are: 1. that the Oxford is a space where significant experiences occur in the lives of the scene's participants; 2. the relationship between the scene and venue is intricate and has a convoluted and sometimes contradictory historical development; and 3. the emphasis on 'local' contributes to the Oxford's social experience and broadens the scope of the venue as a vital piece of local cultural infrastructure. How local policy-making might draw on these conclusions constitutes the final discussion of the thesis.

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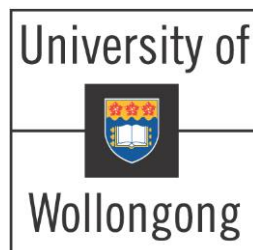
Gordon Waitt

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‘Mild-mannered bistro by day,
eclectic freak-land at night’

The Oxford Tavern as Heterotopia and Cultural Asset



Ben Gallan

A thesis submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements of the Honours degree of
Bachelor of Science in the School of Earth and Environmental Sciences, University of
Wollongong (2010).

The information in this thesis is entirely the result of investigations conducted by the author, unless otherwise acknowledged, and has not been submitted in part, or otherwise, for any other degree or qualification.

Signed: B. Gallan

Date: 6/4/2010

Abstract

In an era in which regional planning is increasingly influenced by a creative cities agenda cultural infrastructure is becoming increasingly relevant. While creative city planning and debates about cultural infrastructure are in their infancy it is timely to critically assess how infrastructure is connected to cultural practices. Focussing on the Oxford Tavern, a pub and music venue in the city of Wollongong, this thesis introduces heterotopic space as neglected sites of social and cultural significance. This thesis aims to: 1. document how participants describe their experiences of participation in a local scene; 2. analyse the relationship between a music venue and a music scene; and 3. theorise how the Oxford can be understood as a cultural asset for Wollongong. In doing so, this thesis critically positions the Oxford within academic and policy discourses of creative cities and cultural infrastructure.

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1

Introduction

This thesis is about a pub that is a live music venue: the Oxford Tavern in Wollongong. This thesis tells the story of the participants of the live music scene that is focussed at the Oxford Tavern. I explore the significance of the pub to the music scene's participants, and why the venue has been previously absent in discussions about cultural infrastructure, development and planning in Wollongong. In understanding why the venue has been ignored this thesis attempts to develop a counteractive framework through which cultural space can be valued and considered significant.

Cultural infrastructure and cultural planning

The wider context for this research is that debate has intensified recently regarding the provision of cultural infrastructure, especially in regions outside capital cities – and how cultural infrastructure can best meet the needs and opportunities present in communities. The Public Works Committee of the NSW State Government recently led an inquiry into the research and development of Arts and Cultural infrastructure outside the Sydney CBD (2008). The inquiry's aims were to assess the suitability of public infrastructure for arts and cultural life as well as addressing issues of funding, community access, and economic impacts, prompted by observation of severe imbalances between the concentration of funding and venues within the Sydney CBD and public outcry from regional NSW for adequate cultural infrastructure provision.

Wollongong City Council's Cultural Services Division made a submission to the inquiry arguing that planning and development for improved cultural facilities has been a prominent theme within a number of council divisions since 2000 (2008). The submission stated that other Council priorities and a societal lack of recognition of the importance of the arts and culture has seen their efforts stagnate within city development. And yet, although cultural infrastructure needs of diverse arts and cultural activities including circus arts and local museums were subject to discussion, local and original live music (the focus of this thesis) remained absent from Wollongong City Council's submission to this inquiry. Local live music – it seems – is not on the radar of cultural planning in Wollongong.

Wollongong is located in a peculiar situation, which magnifies both issues of access to cultural infrastructure and issues of community appropriateness of cultural

infrastructure provision. It is considered a regional city outside Sydney, with a population of 280,000 people and certainly requires its own strategies for cultural planning to be distinctive from those of Australia's largest metropolis. Yet it is only 80km south of Sydney, meaning that for high profile arts and cultural activities, it is possible for Wollongong residents to travel to Sydney – thus cutting into the local market (Waitt & Gibson 2009). The city has a rich legacy of steel production that still continues with the council pursuing economic development into tourism, education and health (Waitt & Gibson 2009). Arts and cultural activities such as live music have been present in Wollongong across several generations, yet have been low profile – even been subterranean in stories of the city's history and culture – because of the masculine domination of city identities, the regional obsession with sport, and denigration of arts and culture as not central to the region's economy (Waitt & Gibson 2009). A lack of credibility and visibility afflicting the arts in general in Wollongong is amplified in the case of local live music, which has thus far completely evaded policy or academic attention. For this reason, local live music in Wollongong provides a unique lens through which to explore debates about cultural infrastructure, and the value we attach to culture outside of the state's capital, Sydney.

One recent example where these issues come together in Wollongong is the 'Blue Mile Vision' (2007), developed by Wollongong City Council as a flagship urban redevelopment scheme aiming to revitalise the city centre and adjacent beachside precincts. The Blue Mile was spawned as an attempt to help Wollongong grow into a prosperous, attractive and vibrant regional city – and pivotally, it includes the development of an entertainment precinct within the city centre of Wollongong. The same plan was also present in Wollongong City Council's submission to the NSW government cultural infrastructure inquiry, described as a "cultural precinct" and "multi-purpose arts making space". And yet, the Blue Mile Vision, as well as the inquiry submission (2008) and Wollongong City Council's most recent cultural plan (2006a) ignore local and original live music in the night-time economy. Where the Council does address live music in terms of cultural infrastructure is with: the Wollongong Entertainment Centre – a venue that caters for large scale national and international acts - and the Wollongong Conservatorium of Music, located in the grounds of the city's botanical gardens. By contrast, nothing is said about grass-roots live music-making in these plans and documents.

This thesis responds to this injustice and focuses solely on local and original live music and the spaces within which live music is found – and how these can be integrated into thinking about what constitutes ‘valuable’ local culture in a regional city setting.

Live music venues: vulnerable spaces of creativity in the city

Pubs and clubs have played a central role in providing musical spaces in Australia that foster the development of unique styles of local live musical production and consumption (Homan 2000). In his landmark study on how live music venues are regulated, Homan (2003) argued that pubs represent the ‘authentic’ space of live musical production within an Australian cultural context. And yet, despite Homan’s advances in research about the impacts of regulation on live music, the grounded way in which music scenes and music venues inter-relate in terms of cultural infrastructure is under theorised.

This is problematic, because also emerging recently have been several high-profile cases where live music venues/pubs are under threat of closure. At a time when iconic live music venues that are pubs look like disappearing, it is pertinent to conduct research to better understand the cultural value of these live music venues. Recently the Hopetoun Hotel in the Sydney suburb of Surrey Hills was closed for “*undisclosed reasons*” (Harvey 2009). The fate of the Hopetoun has led to media attention surrounding live music venues in Sydney that claim to also be under threat (Olding 2009). Newspaper articles and public forums have fuelled speculation that financial burdens, requirements to increase security and facility upgrades, noise complaints, and police fines are to blame for the closures and that there is a dire need to ‘save’ the venue (Harvey 2009). However, online forums of social networking sites have also seen arguments put forward that the survival of the music scenes within these city pubs depends more on active scene *participation* (<http://savethehoey.blogspot.com>). This provides an interesting anomaly to address – the sense of ownership and responsibility that exists between music venues and music scenes. This is a theme that will resonate throughout this thesis on the Oxford Tavern in Wollongong.

Live music as cultural asset

This thesis seeks to understand how live music venues are cultural spaces that are valued in particular ways by those who use them. In this way, the thesis contributes to a broader research project – the ARC-funded CAMRA project (Cultural Asset Mapping for Regional Australia – see <http://culturemap.org.au/>). The project's aims are: to determine what constitutes cultural assets in regional areas (e.g. physical infrastructures, unique forms of vernacular creativity and local cultural heritage); establish methods of mapping cultural assets; and determine how cultural assets might inform regional development planning.

The concept of cultural assets allows new forms of culture and creativity to be introduced into the debate about creative cities and cultural infrastructure. Often past attempts to audit and theorise cultural and creative industries have rested on assumptions about what constitutes 'creativity' – especially as emanating from big city contexts (Gibson & Klocker 2005; Gibson 2010a). In reaction, there have been increasing calls in academic debates for research to open up understandings of creativity, drawn from ethnographic research among communities (Gibson 2010a; Mayes 2010). The CAMRA project entails researchers from universities, local government partners and rural communities developing new methods to understand how local culture is valued and what cultural assets might come to mean in the context of specific non-metropolitan places. Wollongong is one of those places, and this thesis contributes to this overall effort by using an ethnographic method to explore how local live music and a key venue can be considered cultural assets.

Accordingly, this thesis will focus specifically on introducing the space of the Oxford Tavern to this debate. The Oxford Tavern is a Wollongong pub that faces an uncertain future: it exists within an area of heavy development in the city centre, an area hit by the economic crisis of 2009 and notoriously central to the Wollongong corruption scandals that broke in February 2008. The site of development is immediately adjacent to the area encompassed by the Blue Mile Vision and includes a planned retail, residential, office and cinema complex. Proposals to demolish the Oxford Tavern have been approved since 2006 (DA 2006/441), but at the time of writing the pub remains open with demolition plans delayed as potential buyers are sought to take over the project (Shaw 2009).

On its website the Oxford Tavern (2010) proclaims itself as “Wollongong's longest running original live music venue” - one of the reasons it was chosen as the sole case study in this thesis. The venue fosters a rich, diverse and vibrant music scene in which the researcher has been an active participant. But, beyond its own importance to local live music, the story of the venue reveals a complex relationship between music venues and music scenes that provides new ways of determining cultural assets and cultural infrastructure within the context of a regional city.

Research Aims

The aims of this thesis are:

1) To document and analyse the cultural significance of a local live music venue and scene, by exploring:

- How participants describe their experiences of participation in a local scene
- The relationship between a music venue and a music scene
- How the Oxford Tavern can be determined as a cultural asset for Wollongong

And;

2) To critically position the Oxford Tavern within discourses of creative cities and cultural infrastructure.

Outline of Thesis Structure

Chapter 2 will outline the conceptual foundations used and situate the thesis within the relevant literatures on creative cities, cultural infrastructure, music venues and music scenes. It then introduces the key theory of heterotopia to the debate – a theory central to my interpretation of the Oxford Tavern.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodological framework for the project. A rationale is provided for the implementation of a qualitative approach utilising interviews, oral histories, photographs and discourse analysis. A discussion is also developed about the influence of the researcher’s participation in the scene that is the central subject of this study.

Chapter 4 is the first of three ‘results’ chapters, providing an exploration of the experiences of the Oxford Tavern’s scene from the perspective of that scene’s participants. Utilising interviews, oral histories and photographs this chapter ‘tells the story’ of the Oxford through the participants’ subjective accounts. These accounts are contextualised through the researcher’s participant observation.

Chapter 5 seeks to uncover the intricate relationship between the Oxford as a pub, a music venue and a music scene. This chapter illuminates the debate about cultural infrastructure as it constitutes the material space from which the narratives in Chapter 4 emanated.

Chapter 6 reveals a dominant theme exposed in Chapters 4 and 5 concerning the ethos of ‘localism’ that influenced the experience and vitality of the Oxford Tavern. This chapter reinforces how the Oxford Tavern can be regarded as a cultural asset and a key piece of cultural infrastructure in the city of Wollongong.

Chapter 7 synthesises the results of Chapters 4, 5 and 6 and suggests what relevance this holds in the pursuit of a creative city agenda. In concluding the thesis, this chapter discusses the significance of the Oxford Tavern in debates about cultural assets and cultural infrastructure – and how the methodological framework of this thesis and the concept of heterotopia bring a new approach to valuing creative and cultural spaces in the urban landscape.

2

Conceptual Foundations

This thesis (and the CAMRA project within which it is nested) aims to identify and theorise cultural assets in regional areas, developing a new approach seeking to uncover the diverse ways in which people engage with local, regional, creative and cultural practices. Within this framework this thesis aims at understanding creative and cultural practices in the milieu of music venues - in this specific case, the Oxford Tavern. This chapter situates the thesis accordingly in relevant literatures and clarifies how it contributes to an emerging field of research on cultural assets in regional Australia. This requires, initially, a review of the concept of cultural infrastructure that was advanced through theories of creative cities. In turn, understanding a pub as cultural infrastructure requires discussion of live music venues, and of the spatial nature of a diversely utilised resource –the pub. It also involves a discussion of music scenes and the way they form musical performance and consumption practices. This chapter is structured around these key themes. Towards the end of this chapter I then outline the conceptual framework – Foucault’s theory of heterotopia – that I bring to this study of a specific live music venue, to fill existing research gaps and develop a fresh perspective on cultural infrastructure for the creative city.

Creative Cities and Cultural Infrastructure

In probably the most influential (if not also most contested) books on the topic in the past decade, Florida (2002; 2005) developed the concept of the ‘Creative Class’ – what he calls a new socio-economic class comprised of people who work in the fields of science, engineering, architecture, education, design, arts, entertainment and music, but who are also avid, discerning consumers of the products of these industries in their leisure time. Florida argued that the creative class are a discrete social group, and that they are increasingly mobile, abandoning places (including large cities traditionally powerhouses of industry and finance) and moving elsewhere to tap into local innovation cultures, places that are tolerant and supportive of experimentation and entrepreneurialism. For Florida, the ‘creative class’ denotes a type of citizen that cities should be attempting to attract in the post-industrial era, for creativity, it is said, is the new driver of the global economy. Florida’s work is extremely influential in the realms of regional policy making, including in regional Australia, where councils and governments have swarmed to this concept and are now actively pursuing policy-making scripts that envisage becoming a creative place (Gibson & Klocker 2005).

A competitor of Florida's, and another key 'expert' thinker in this field, Charles Landry (2006), explored how creative cities need to be supported by infrastructure – both 'soft' and 'hard'. Landry classified 'soft' infrastructure as a highly skilled and flexible labour force – effective, creative and dynamic thinkers; 'hard' infrastructure represents the buildings, roads and physical space to support and incubate new creative centres in the city.

Major critiques have arisen of this approach. Gibson and Klocker (2005) argued that the popularity of these experts far outweighs their empirical or theoretical significance, with creative city knowledge production coming to be itself a new creative industry of sorts associated with expert consultancies, speaking tours and policy-blueprints for creativity. Markusen (2006) and Peck (2005) both argued the creative class is not a distinct class of people at all, and their jobs are not necessarily inherently creative. Numerous studies have either pointed to the flaws in Florida's creative index (Malanga 2004), or argued that policy-makers' obsessions with indexing places as more or less creative is deeply problematic on ethical and political grounds (Gibson & Klocker 2005; Christophers 2007). Chang and Teo (2009) explored the development of Singapore as a creative city and argued that while work has focussed on the attraction of the creative class little has been written on the socio-spatial tension that these processes create.

Gibson and Klocker (2005) documented how the creative cities policy script has played out across regional Australia in terms of adopting Florida's approach, creating an unsustainably competitive climate and neo-liberalising creativity (favouring forms of creativity that have market value or statistical significance in econometric analysis). This competitive climate has resulted in deliberate attempts by local, state and federal governments in Europe, Asia, North America and Australia to 'inject' culture into urban planning, debates about infrastructure provision and regional development, to see city spaces as potential sites for cultural precincts or clusters (Pratt 2009). Some of these creative developments have sought to incubate new industries, harvest already-existing 'authentic' cultural and creative practices (often associated with local, regional or traditional cultural expressions, crafts and products) as well as incorporating sites of leisure and consumption, such as cafes and bars (Mommaas 2004).

Promotion of creative clusters has led to greater emphasis on cultural infrastructure – what facilities these cities already contain versus what is considered necessary to support a creative city campaign. Pratt (2008) argued that this approach has led to the repeated pursuit of ‘Unique Selling Propositions’ by cities. USPs are “*like a city beauty pageant; the winner gets the investment*” (Pratt 2008, p. 35). USPs can be cultural celebrations such as Carnivale in Rio or physical assets such as Sydney Harbour.

Not every city can lay claim to such wonders as Carnivale or Sydney Harbour and it is these places that, in their pursuit of a creative city, attempted to build USPs in the vision of the Florida/Landry creative city. Typical examples include: museums of modern art (especially branches of the Guggenheim), designated creative districts, publicly-funded incubator buildings (frequently renovated warehouses in gentrifying areas of the inner-city) and new-build film studios (Goldsmith & O’Regan 2005; Freestone & Gibson 2006; Christopherson & Rightor 2010).

As with Florida and Landry’s broader theories, these attempts at cultural infrastructure provision have also been widely criticised. Gomez (1998) and Plaza (1999) have debated the effect that museum franchises such as the Guggenheim have had on urban regenerative strategies. The case of the Guggenheim in Bilbao can be considered a successful implementation of culture driven regenerative strategy in a narrow, commercial sense, as well as in a Bourdieurian sense of quickly-generating artistic credibility and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984). But attempts to merely replicate similar flagship projects are fraught with danger. Grodach (2010) argued that policy should build from existing arts practices and commercial activity rather than gamble on attracting or developing new forms. The danger is that in a rapid pursuit of the cultural capital that flagship infrastructure (e.g. museums and grand theatres) provides the community networks and existing cultural practices - vital to the success of creative lead regenerative strategies - are overlooked or even scorned (Kong 2007; Sacco & Blessi 2009).

This competitive climate of pursuing a neoliberal, competitive creative cities discourse raises serious questions about the types of creativity that are being valued or dismissed (Luckman et al. 2009). It also raises the issue of whom cultural

infrastructure is relevant and practical for. Many ‘creative’ regenerative strategies involve developing infrastructures geared towards ‘high art’ that do not support active participation from the poor and working classes, nor that build on vernacular forms of creativity and culture (Kong 2000).

In response to such criticisms, some places have sought to install cultural infrastructure in a manner more sympathetic to the desires and needs of local populations (inclusive of diversity) and to facilitate career-building in creative industries via infrastructure aimed at supporting creative artists when at their most vulnerable – in between amateur and professional status, when attempting to ‘sell’ their creative work but not yet having secured a viable reputation. Examples include social housing schemes for practising artists – common in the United States (Strom 2010), although not in Australia (Gibson & Dufty 2006), as well as workshops, rehearsal spaces and studios for young musicians and visual artists (Hudson 1995). This thesis aims to explore one such type of vernacular cultural infrastructure – music venues – that has not yet been the centre of academic research or policy-making about creative cities. It does so within the context of Wollongong, which is a city actively pursuing the creative cities discourse, but which has not yet identified live music venues as necessary cultural infrastructure. To achieve this the thesis aims to explore the relationship between a Wollongong music venue as cultural infrastructure, and the local cultural and creative practices that are contained within it, in the form of a music scene.

Music Venues

Writing about specific music venues in the academic field has been sporadic. One identified trend was that the literature on music venues did not tend to focus on vernacular uses or contemporary social interaction within everyday music venues. The debates instead focussed on music venues as cultural heritage, as spaces that are associated with famous genres or bands in popular music consciousness and thus became entwined in conflicts about cultural preservation and tourist commodification.

The Cavern Club is a venue in Liverpool England that is iconic as the ‘Home of the Beatles’. Sara Cohen (1998; 2007) explored the different ways the venue has been valued throughout its history. She explored how the Cavern underwent a transition

from a site of subcultural expression that was considered subversive to mainstream society, and was then demolished. The Cavern site and its mythological status were reconstructed as a focal point of Beatles tourism in the city that acted as a spear head to the construction of a cultural quarter named the Cavern Quarter.

Gibson and Connell (2007) argued that similar processes to the Cavern Club have seen the Beale Street district in Memphis proceed through a comparable transition. Beale Street is considered to be the roots of black music and the home of Elvis Presley. The site was considered a deviant area, stigmatised by prostitution, nightlife and the fact that it was a predominately an African-American area. The Beale St. district was demolished in the late 1960s but has been re-developed as a tourist mecca that exploits the area's rich musical heritage.

Both these examples show the processes involved in valuing music venues (albeit belatedly), and their related scenes in terms of economic and tourist potential. Both sites were reconstructed yet remained devoid of the living landscape that made them culturally significant in the first place. In neither place do local live music scenes inhabit venues; rather they are given over to nostalgia acts and tourist-orientated entertainment. Notwithstanding the possibility that these forms of music performance are in themselves creative and rewarding for those involved, contributions to meaningful grass-roots development of a dynamic music scene are questionable (a pattern mirrored in New Orleans where both before and after Katrina the local live music scene was focused in poor neighbourhoods away from the central French Quarter, where most of the visible music venues were located – see Gibson and Connell 2005; Gotham 2005). This casts serious doubts over preservation and heritage movements as options to protect the vibrancy of local live music scenes. The difficulty is that recognition of live music as cultural heritage ushers in a temptation to 'freeze' it in an aesthetic and subcultural sense, while tourism potential threatens the ability to cherish live music venues for their cultural heritage without exploiting them.

This created a significant issue of tension in the development of the conceptual framework for this thesis. It was initially envisaged that heritage literature would form a substantive element of this project, because in cases such as the Hopetoun Hotel in Sydney live music fans have been quick to look to the heritage movement for

protection and a means to 'save' their venue. However, as will become apparent as this thesis progresses, this heritage angle proved not to be so crucial after all.

In one instance, Shaw (2005) examined the way in which a heritage framework and significant community organisation worked. It was required to stave off redevelopment that threatened the viability of Melbourne venues, most importantly the Esplanade Hotel, to continue providing live music. An alliance of musicians, artists, venue owners and patrons, under the campaign moniker of 'Fair Go 4 Live Music' aimed at defending the city's alternative scenes from infringing residential developments and complaints of new gentrifying residents. The Esplanade Hotel has a rich legacy of musical association stretching back as far as the late 19th century. Community organisation and justification of the venue's musical significance (combined with its architectural qualities) led to the 'Espy' gaining heritage status locally. But, Melbourne and Wollongong share quite different cultural histories and geographies. Wollongong's proximity to the major metropolis of Sydney is one example: although it can be argued that Wollongong needs its own cultural infrastructure for live music (something I will assert later in this thesis), the proximity to Sydney and its many live venues deflates the proposition that without heritage protection, people from Wollongong will have nowhere to see live music. More importantly, live music itself occupies different positions in the imaginations of Melbournians and residents of Wollongong. Melbourne prides itself on its cultural richness (even to the point of bragging about it in national tourism marketing campaigns) and it is considered the live music capital of Australia. So there is much political capital to be gained from a heritage campaign around live music in Melbourne. In Wollongong however, as we have already seen, the current debate about valuing cultural assets and cultural infrastructure has avoided live music completely. Whereas 'cultural precincts' and arts infrastructure are on the radar of city planners, live music has not yet been a part of this. Indeed, the plans to demolish the Oxford Tavern have already been given the all clear by Wollongong City Council's heritage department (DA 2006/441) and no visible or obvious resistance to this has surfaced (including in interviews conducted for this thesis). So in reality the efficacy of a heritage argument around a live music venue in Wollongong is questionable.

As will become more apparent as this thesis continues, the cultural value attached to the Oxford Tavern is its status as a subversive space – a *heterotopia* (see below) – for which the prospects of heritage protection are at odds with the oppositional ethos underpinning the scene that made it a meaningful space in the first place. As this topic developed and the themes of results from field work became clearer it became the case that the literature on live music venues as cultural heritage had become much less relevant than I had first imagined. The examples of Beale Street and the Cavern Club are pertinent, not for how the Oxford Tavern should be imagined, but precisely for how it should not become. For this reason a heritage framework was not pursued as central to the conceptual foundation of this thesis.

Operating largely outside the heritage debate, Homan's (2000; 2003; 2008) research provided the most extensive overview of the social processes that have led to Australian pubs become a primary site of musical consumption and production within Australian culture. His research showed how pubs emerged as live venues in Australia in the 1950s and 1960s, and subsequent moral panics that surrounded the subcultures that inhabited them. Homan's work identified the key legislative frameworks - concerned with public assembly and noise - that have hindered the emergence and survival of Australian pubs as music venues. Homan (2003) has also documented the decline of Sydney's live music venues in relation to licensing restrictions that aren't as strictly applied to other nightspots as they are to music venues. This work is also highly relevant in the way it explored how performers and consumers of live music have been represented or positioned as 'unruly' and how this in turn infuses regulatory apparatuses.

This project builds on the ground carved out by Homan for this reason, but in addition aims to introduce the vernacular *experiences* of scene participants within the music venue that the Oxford provides. In doing so this displays how music venues in the night-time economy can be considered living, dynamic cultural assets. This thesis also provides a means to understand the intricate relationship between music venues and the scenes that they contain.

Music scenes and geography

The concept of music scenes provides the clearest way to understand music practices in place (in the context of this thesis, within a live music venue). For Cohen (1999, p. 239) a scene describes the people, organisations, events and situations associated with the production and consumption of a particular musical style. Cohen's argument provides some form of synthesis to a highly debated and widely utilised concept of 'scene' that is outlined below.

The literature reveals that the connection between music and place influences the concept of music scenes. Hudson (2006) argued that there is overwhelming evidence that music has the ability to both invoke images of place as well as feelings of attachment to place. Connell and Gibson (2003) identified a distinct theme within music press and artist biographies of locating an artist or scene in a physical space or with distinct geographical roots – as a marketing ploy as much as an ethno-musicological 'reality'. This provides an explanation for the way in which particular 'sounds' are attributed to scenes in particular places, such as the Detroit Sound or Liverpool Sound. Such associations are not as simple as an environmental determinist influence of place on music. Associations between music and place are invented and mythologised even at their time of development. Environmental determinism does not effectively explain the rich detail of local music, scenes or sounds (Connell & Gibson 2003, p. 115.)

Bennett and Peterson (2004) argued that scenes could be divided into three categories local, translocal and virtual, where local scenes are characterized by a specific geographic element, and the literature focuses on social, cultural or economic characteristics. Translocal scenes are conceptualised as dispersed scenes that identify and communicate through a shared definitive musical genre or lifestyle. Virtual scenes consist of greater physical diffusion than translocal scenes, and are brought together through fanzines and increasing use of the internet. In the scene based literature it is often the case that these simple definitions do not neatly apply to the approaches used by scholars and much of the literature addresses the way in which scenes exist across these scales of local and global (or local, translocal and virtual). For instance Mitchell (2001) framed the local/global debate by analysing the subculture and musical genre of Hip-Hop outside of the United States, a genre which

is predominately seen as an expression of African-American culture. Mitchell argued that Hip-Hop can represent global youth identity extending well beyond the U.S. Furthermore, Mitchell argued that places as diverse as France, Bulgaria, Japan and New Zealand develop distinctive manifestations of Hip-Hop that reflect local cultures as vividly as global cultures (see also Warren and Evitt 2010). Similarly Harris (2000) considered the idea of the scaled nature of scenes by documenting the career of Brazilian band Sepultura who play extreme metal music. Harris argued that Sepultura are globally popular and subsequently operate across a variety of scenes instead of being fixed spatially within one distinct scene. Harris therefore saw scenes as having a relationship between global and local spaces instead of a dichotomy of either local or global. Straw (1991, p. 373) regarded scenes as a cultural space in which musical practices co-exists and interact, placing emphasis on the *trajectories* bands follow in a career and the notion of cross-fertilization between scenes and genres - spanning local, regional and global networks.

In this thesis, the concept of scenes is important because it reveals the extent of which musical practices are often tied to subcultural connections, global trends, or a linear progression between local, translocal and global. What differs in the approach of this thesis is the emphasis of musical and social interaction within a fixed geographical space, reliant on the fixed infrastructure of a music venue and pub.

Local Music Scenes as social formations

The debate around local and global relevance pervades some of the literature on scenes. They overemphasise understanding the relationship between the two at the expense of interpreting social meanings of music, and participation in music scenes. Studies into local scenes have explored the social aspects of musical participation to a greater degree. This approach is essential for uncovering the intricate nature of music scenes and scene participation within material spaces such as live music venues.

Finnegan (1989) examined musical participation in the English town of Milton-Keynes. With a focus on amateur musicians, her research encompassed orchestras; church choirs; and amateur bands of folk, jazz and rock. Using ethnographic methods this was a seminal text that stressed the relevance of local music and the importance of community participation in its inherent creative practices.

Bennett (1997; 2000) argued that the local aspects of music scenes hold significant importance to its active participants, irrespective of whether they are coherent or oppositional enough to be considered a subcultural formation, including whether they relate to the global music industry in any way. His article focused on the ‘pub rock’ scene in Northern England and began to draw on the experience of drinking and socialising in scene based activities (Bennett 1997, p. 98). The importance of this stance is to understand scenes in terms of social interaction and not only musical practices, a theme highly relevant to exploring a music scene within a pub.

Grossberg (1984) described musical impact on everyday life as a space in which pleasure was produced. Grossberg explained this in terms of ‘Affective Alliances’. Affective alliances explains the *“organisation of...practices and events, cultural forms and social experience which both opens up and structures the space of our affective investments in the world”* (Grossberg 1984, p. 227). This approach would come to inform later theorisation in cultural studies and cultural geography on the performativity of identity and on the embodied experience of space.

For example, Kruse (1993) explored the way in which musical scenes allow for the formation of identity, arguing that they provide a space where race, class and gender intersect with taste in music. The concept of identity formation is important in understanding musical scenes but is not dealt with completely by the scene-based literature. Where Kruse makes a significant contribution is describing the formation of identity not just in terms of fostering community, as Frith did (see below), but also the way in which identity serves to place scene members outside of mainstream cultural expectations. This is particularly relevant in this thesis as will become clearer below in discussion of the concept of heterotopia, and in results chapters describing the music scene at the Oxford Tavern – where being ‘alternative’ matters.

In describing the rock community Frith (1981) argued that there was little difference in the social experience between performers and audience. His article stressed the sense of community that live musical performance fosters. In comparing rock music (his broad definition for musical performance in scenes) to folk music Frith described the way in which people became part of a social group that could reject the everyday constraints they may feel from their life (Frith 1981, p. 168). This notion of

community facilitates the purpose of music, in that performers are producing a communal experience rather than commercial products. This is relevant to this thesis – as will be seen in Chapters 4 and 6 – because for the Oxford Tavern its music scene has involved a conscious process of community-building between performers and audiences, blurring the boundary between production and consumption.

O'Connor (2002) disputed the notion of cultural hybridity, evident in global approaches, and defined scenes as the creation of infrastructure that supports bands and other forms of creativity. O'Connor's definition contrasts theorisations on globalised trends in music by defining a scene as having a *fixed* geographical and social base. O'Connor argues it is these processes that lead to the development of recording spaces, shared houses and music venues that scenes rely on. The importance of this approach is that fixed local geographical factors are taken into account—prioritising material space in the manner undertaken here for the Oxford Tavern.

The specificities of local Australian music scenes have been the subject of prior research. Bennett et al (2008) theorised the important geographical elements of Australian scenes, recognising that as a large geographical area, Australia consists of small numbers of densely populated centres. They argue that although politically unified these centres of population have evolved unique city cultures in relative isolation from each other. Papers included in their special edition included historical analysis of the music scene in Sydney in the 1970s (Homan 2008) and Perth in the 1960s-70s (Stratton 2008); geographical work on the isolation of Darwin's music scene (Luckman et al. 2008); and a thorough collection of work on Brisbane's music scene - influenced by Stafford (2004) – in which the Queer music and club scene (Taylor 2008) and Brisbane's indie music scene (Rogers 2008) were revealed to share similar experiences and processes of marginalization. While this body of work constitutes specific scholarly attention paid to the scenes of Brisbane, Darwin, Sydney and Perth, accompanied by Shaw's (2005) work on the Melbourne music scene, no academic literature has yet studied the music scene of Wollongong.

The acknowledgement of fixed geographical and social bases in an Australian context is particularly pertinent in assessing local scenes. This is especially relevant to this thesis as it explores the relationship of a specific scene to the local infrastructure on

which it depends. Cohen (1999, p. 241) argued that live venues really become a focal point of a scene and musical practice from a social perspective - in this way the venue makes the scene more physical, visible and real. Cohen's recognition of venues eschews the binary between global and local musicological influences by considering the fixed material spaces of musical performance and production along with their associated social meanings.

This is the approach that this thesis undertakes. It seeks to tell a story of the music scene within the Oxford Tavern from the perspective of participants in that scene. Literatures on creative cities, cultural infrastructure, music venues and music scenes discussed here thus far are all relevant. Beyond these literatures, this thesis seeks to develop another lens through which to understand the experience of the local music scene and the relationship between the scene and the music venue, a lens shaped by the concept of heterotopia, which the next subsection will explore.

Heterotopia

A key concept I use here for examining the spatial complexities of the Oxford Tavern is Foucault's (1986) theory of heterotopia. Foucault argued that heterotopias are spaces that exist in society that invert accepted cultural and social norms, yet which are not necessarily criminalised or shut-down. The space of the Oxford Tavern can be interpreted as a heterotopia because it allows for a measure of unruly behaviour at the boundaries (or beyond) social acceptability: drunkenness, expressions of fashion, music and attitude considered confrontational or offensive in other spaces. This thesis recognises music scenes as heterotopias.

Foucault (1986) argued that heterotopias are fluid space that can exist temporally. In Stavrides' (2007) interpretation, heterotopias are not only a spatial seclusion but also the process of producing a collective 'otherness' within a certain time. As will be illustrated later in this thesis, such temporality is reflected in the participant's narratives of the Oxford tavern in two ways. First, the Oxford *temporarily* serves the function as a music venue - hence the heterotopia exists within a certain limited time frame and does not remain constant. The space of the Oxford can become different places at different times to different clientele, whilst temporarily a music venue the Oxford is a site of musical performance and consumption, a social space, a drinking

space and a cultural space. Second, the behaviour within and experience of heterotopias exist in a significant period of the participants' lives. The recollections of Oxford participants overlap and converge persistently - there is not a constant or absolute account but a succession and intersection of temporal experiences of this music venue and scene over decades, as generations change and new 'scenes' develop to slowly replace older ones. Chapter 4 documents the participants' experience of the Oxford's heterotopia with attention brought to these two senses of temporality.

Heterotopias also involve the juxtaposition of several places within a given space and have different meanings from different perspectives. In this way heterotopias vary in significance to different observers or participants. The Oxford is heterotopic in this manner due to the stratified nature of pub-space. The Oxford Tavern becomes heterotopic intermittently; by juxtaposing the space of a pub with the place of a local live music scene and venue - this particular phenomenon is the focus of Chapter 5.

A heterotopia represents both closed and open space – there are signatory practices which allow entry, and they are not easily accessible as a public space. Participation in a music scene is an intricate social and cultural experience. The scene of the Oxford operates as a reclusive space to the mainstream urban nightscape of Wollongong and adheres to different conventional norms, stressing localism - of which Chapter 6 is the focus. Participants in the scene are actively involved in the creation and expression of cultural values and recognise other active participants through this shared ideological behaviour. These processes constitute signatory practices. As such the experience of the Oxford as a heterotopia, as it is conceptualised here, is concerned with active *participants* of the Oxford scene rather than temporary or infrequent *patrons* of the Oxford. These *patrons* can access the space of the Oxford as a pub or venue but don't automatically access the heterotopia of the music scene.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided the conceptual foundations for this thesis. By addressing the literature on creative cities, cultural infrastructure and music venues this chapter has explored the politicised landscape of planning and development within which music venues, as cultural infrastructure, exist. An analysis of music scenes has revealed varying approaches to understanding musical practices on local and global

scales. Significant work has been conducted to understand the intricate social experience of scenes interacting with musical practices but does not reveal a clear conceptual lens to address the relationship between music venues and scenes. To address this imbalance this chapter has outlined how Foucault's theory of heterotopia will be used in exploring the Oxford Tavern as a music scene and music venue.

3

Methodology

This thesis used a cultural geographic framework through which qualitative methods were employed. Qualitative methods are used in cultural geography to reveal human experiences and social processes (Winchester 2000, p. 3). Cultural geographers utilise these methods because they tell us a great detail about people's experiences and attitudes of a space, place or concept but also reveal underlying social structures.

Conducting a literature review has revealed that there is not a distinct methodological precedent that could be employed while approaching this research. This project takes lead from Bailey et al. (1999, p. 170) who state that:

Due to the dynamic nature and varied epistemologies and methods of qualitative research, the criteria for the evaluation of individual projects must arise from the research process itself.

Bailey et al. (1999) recognised a tension in qualitative methods between the need to provide standardized and rigorous researching methods while still allowing the flexibility for 'creative' methods to be pursued, including possibilities that present themselves throughout the research process.

The establishment of a methodological framework has been an ongoing process – it was not a starting point from which to embark from. Allowing flexibility for the participatory nature of the research was essential (because I was and still am an active participant of the music scene at the Oxford Tavern) while still maintaining that the research design adequately adhered to conventions of the interpretative community. Baxter and Eyles (1997) argued that for a research project to meet the expectations of the interpretative scientific community rigour needs to be established. Establishing rigour involves ensuring credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Credibility represents the need to capture authentic insights into the lived experience of the participants. This was achieved through prolonged contact with the subject material. Participants were empowered to tell their personal subjective accounts through the inclusion of photographic evidence and a snowballing recruitment method.

Transferability involves ensuring that the research can contribute to the context of the field outside of the study. This project achieved transferability by introducing a

methodological framework that helps to uncover the interaction between cultural infrastructure and the social and cultural processes and practices they contain. As part of the CAMRA project it is foreseen that the research contained in this study will effectively contribute to the further aims of the project.

Dependability is defined as minimizing idiosyncrasies in interpretation. The researcher learnt much about the Oxford through the interviews with the participants: in this manner it is accepted that there are multiple-realities in the experiences of the Oxford and every participant (including the researcher) is connected to the Oxford in a variant nature.

Confirmability involves revealing the extent to which the biases, perspectives and subjectivity of the researcher affects the interpretation of the research. This is a significant process as the researcher is intricately connected to both the subject of the research and many of the project's participants. Confirmability was achieved by constant reflection and by devising methods to deal with the researcher's positionality. These are explored below.

Participation and Observation

Participant observation involves the researcher immersing themselves within the context of the study's interest and using subsequent observations as a primary source of data. This method has the advantage of giving the researcher a contextual understanding as well as providing a complimentary description to other methods such as interviewing.

Participant observation has been utilised by geographers as a method seeking to gain a broader understanding of the meanings of place and contexts of everyday-life (Kearns 2000, p. 195). Gold (1958, in Kearns 2000) defined four possible types of a researcher's role: complete observer; observer as participant; participant as observer; and complete participant. The participant observation utilised in this project most easily falls within the latter of these four definitions. This is because my participation in the scene preceded any research, or observation, on the subject. Considering the limited nature of these definitions a further framework was needed to understand the researcher's participation in the music scene. These experiences influenced the way

the thesis has been approached including the opinions and interpretations of the venue, the participants and their responses.

I am a 25 year old male from an Anglo-Australian background. I have played in bands for over a decade ranging in musical style from hardcore to jazz. After moving to Wollongong in late 2005 I began participating in the punk scene through attending shows at the Oxford Tavern and Wollongong Youth Centre. This participation led to creation of a band in mid-2006 called Reason Strikes. Reason Strikes released two independent EPs in 2007 and 2008 entitled 'The Art of Chaos' and 'These Songs We Sing'. We performed locally (with at least a dozen shows at the Oxford) as well as toured regularly to Sydney, Canberra and briefly to Melbourne. This participation in the Wollongong punk scene preceded the researcher's geographical studies and significantly informed the development of this research project.

After learning post-structuralist theories such as performative space, discourse analysis and qualitative research methods in undergraduate studies I immediately found myself thinking through how these applied to my experiences of playing and supporting local music – the Oxford provided the lens through which an understanding of spatial thinking was developed. This raised curiosity about the links and interpretations that cultural geography could offer. The conceptual skills learnt through human geography have provided a unique way of understanding and experiencing participation in a music scene.

Close participation contributes undoubted strengths to the research process. McGregor and Gibson (2009) extolled the virtues of autobiographical-ethnography in understanding music scenes. McGregor is a DJ who was an active member of the dance music scene in Dunedin - this then formed the basis of their research. Auto-ethnographic or autobiographic ethnography allows for richer detail to be revealed about the scene than might typically be revealed in more standardised research processes suppose some measure of objectivity is possible.

Banks (2003, p. 88) argued that researching issues that are central to your life experiences contributed to the field of geographical knowledge but also led to new ways of understanding one's surroundings, which Banks felt was an empowering

experience. Combining literature and personal experience can help to reveal discourses overlooked in the literature.

The development of this thesis was born out of a frustration that the academic literatures on scenes and subcultures couldn't adequately describe the emotion and behaviours involved with participating in the Oxford's scene. Some of the most intense and memorable experiences of my youth and musical life have occurred within the Oxford Tavern. Approaches such as Bennett's (1997) touch on the social dimensions of scene participation but it was felt that greater depth was needed to effectively argue the affective significance of the Oxford Tavern. Participation is the overarching influence that prompted the focus of this study. In this case it is important to address the personal values placed on local live music and the role that the Oxford plays in the vitality of music in Wollongong.

Yet a contradiction was ever-present between 'me as participant' and 'me as researcher'. Sutherland (2004) provided a way of conceptualising the simultaneous relationship between being a uniquely-positioned researcher, and being an 'insider' of another sort. Sutherland's PhD research focussed on Asian women working in the Australian clothing industry as outworkers, a field in which she was also an activist against the exploitation of these workers. She understood her positioning in research through the use of Russian literary theorist Bakhtin's concept of 'dialogism'. Dialogism describes texts as socially constructed and the embodiment of two or more distinct voices within one hybrid text (cf. Holloway and Kneale 2000). In Sutherland's case dialogism allowed her to understand how her 'voices' of an activist, English teacher, volunteer, interviewer and researcher *intersected*, without the need to synthesise those perspectives into a singular account.

In my case, dialogism provided the clearest framework for understanding my positionality within the scene which was the subject of the research. The dual voices of participant and observer are in a state of constant flux - influencing interpretations but also contributing to values. The methodological approach is very much constructed through opinions that local live music is worthy of cultural appreciation which have been learned through participatory practices in the Oxford Tavern.

A particularly problematic ‘voice’ that dialogism helped to resolve was the discourses of the punk subculture (for discussion on subcultures see Appendix 1). The ‘voice’ of ‘punk’ was utilised to establish rapport with participants, in that we shared common ground and sensibilities: this helped to elicit rich narratives. The familiar relationship between me and some of the participants meant that the ‘voice’ through which our interactions and interviews were contained were ‘punk’, as this forms the discursive influence of our relationship through the music scene. For others, being familiar with who I was and the ‘punk’ genre of my band – but not necessarily familiar with me outside of the research project, meant that they introduced the term ‘punk’ themselves, assuming this was the nature of my interest. So while some participants used the term ‘punk’ dialogism helped me to understand that this didn’t necessarily draw upon strict subcultural conventions of ‘punk’ as the literature assumes and they could have really been referring to different subcultural dialects to what I consider ‘punk’ through my own involvement. Dialogism helped to deconstruct the ‘voices’ through which the participants and I were interacting.

Recording Participation

A detailed research diary was kept for a two year period throughout the development of this research project (the honours year being preceded by a directed studies report in third year human geography as well as keeping a participant observation diary going, out of personal interest). The research diary involved taking photographs of activities at the Oxford, taking a note pad to any attended shows, collecting flyers and posters, remembering conversations and collecting related and contextual material from the internet. The diary provided both a means of data and a site of reflection on the methodological approach of the project.

Once the formal honours year had commenced, the venue was contacted through mail and follow-up phone calls to discuss the possibility of collecting vox-pop interviews within the venue during different nights. The vox-pop concept was aimed at gathering a large quantity of 1-2 minute interviews about why people attended the Oxford, what they enjoyed about it, what they disliked about it - an idea based on a method trialled elsewhere at festivals by human geographers on the CAMRA project (see Gibson 2010b). Because permission was not granted by the Oxford to conduct vox-pops at the venue (no reply was simply ever received to my requests) this method was

abandoned. It was decided that attempting to go ahead with this method would change the nature of the researcher's access to the venue, possibly with negative consequences as to admittance and surveillance.

Recruitment

Following failure to secure permission to conduct vox-pops within the venue, I chose to follow the scene at the Oxford Tavern through more conventional interviews – with scene participants. The participants who contributed the qualitative data of the project were recognised by me, before being approached, as participants in the Oxford Tavern's scene. A total of 26 participants (Table 3.1) were *officially* involved in the research process to varying degrees and via different methods of participation. Countless other conversations and discussions are obviously impossible to document completely, given the nature of my participation, though many excerpts were contained in the research diary and occasionally feature in Chapters 4 to 6. Participants were recruited through face-to-face contact at the Oxford, email, phone calls, text messaging and social networking sites (Facebook and MySpace). Success rates from invitation to participation were, to be honest, a little disappointing – although were typical of conducting research on music scenes, where response rates are often low (Gibson 2000).

Table 3.1 Table of participants

Pseudonym	Association with Oxford	Method of participation	Location of Interview	Sex/ Age
Ian	Consumer/photographer	Interview, photos	Participant's Home	M/25
KC	Consumer/ex-employee	Interview	University	F/32
Brazen	Performer/consumer	Interview	Car – post band practice.	M/24
Pat	Performer/consumer	Interview	Oxford - beer garden	M/40
Hat	Ex-Sound technician	Email interview	Email	M/39
Buttons	Consumer	Photographic interview	Facebook	M/23
Muz	Consumer, performer	Email interview, photos	Email	M/28
Jae	Consumer, performer	Email interview	Email	M/24
Robbo	Former booking agent, performer, consumer	Interview	Participants home	M/49
Jeb	Former booking agent, performer, consumer	Interview	Local music shop	M/35
Hardy	Consumer	Interview	Oxford – Beer garden	F/23
Luke	Performer, consumer	Interview	Bald Faced Stag	M/30
Amez	Consumer	Group interview	Post show – Oxford	F/22
Mother	Performer, consumer	Group interview	Post show – Oxford	M/23
Son	Performer, consumer	Group interview	Post show – Oxford	M/32
Brad	Consumer, performer	Group interview	Post show – Oxford	M/19
Dave	Short-film maker, consumer	Email interview	Email	M/38
Mal	Consumer, performer	Photographic interview	Facebook	M/24
Amber	Consumer	Photographic interview, photos	MySpace	F/22
Matt	Consumer	Photographic interview	Facebook	M/28
Clem	Performer, consumer	Photographic interview	Facebook	M/23
Evelyn	Consumer	Photographic interview	Email and Facebook	F/22
Dan	Consumer, performer	Interview	Email and Facebook	M/25
Pete	Performer, consumer	Photographic interview	Facebook	M/21
Big John	Consumer	Interview	Oxford	M/20
Amy	Consumer	Photographic interview, photos	Email	F/21

Due to participant observation a number of the contacts were made through regular attendance at the venue. KC (F/32, consumer/ex-employee and UOW PhD candidate) became aware of the topic through the project's supervisor and offered to act as a gatekeeper to an older generation of Oxford participants. The process 'snowballed' with a number of key participants recommending vital people that should be invited to participate in the project – which provided valuable insights.

The diagram in Figure 3.2 illustrates the recruiting method used and simultaneously reveals much about the researcher's positionality in relation to the participants. The left hand branch of the diagram illustrates the relationships the researcher had established outside the context of the research process. These are friends, band mates, and acquaintances that the researcher had established through participation. The right hand branch of the diagram provides an example (not exhaustive) of how snowballing occurred throughout the recruitment process.

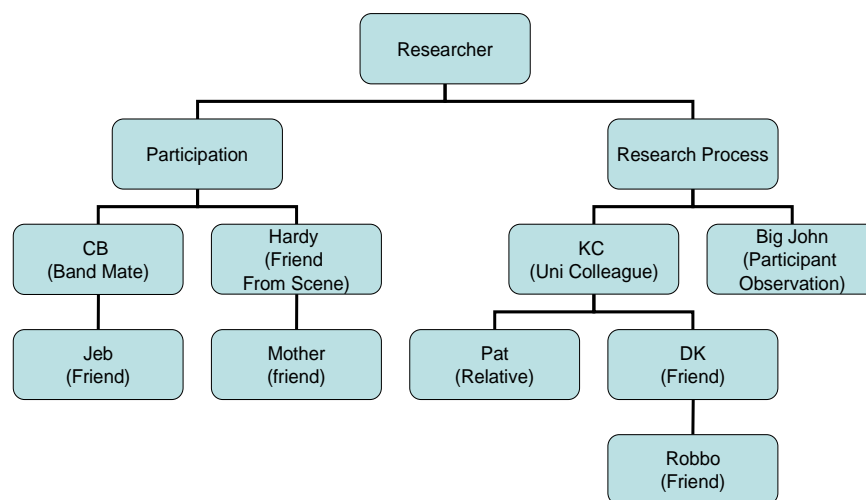


Figure 3.2 Snowball technique of recruitment

The nature of the relationship to some of the participants meant that the formal invitation of participating intersected with the regular informal relationship. This process was documented at times through the research diary and is representative of how the relationships from the left hand branch of the snowball diagram were difficult to approach in a research context. This is where the tools of social networking sites helped to address this problem of people expressing interest in participating in the project, but subsequently becoming difficult to pin down for a face-to-face interview:

Organised two interviews after 12 at night on live chat of Facebook... benefit/curse of dealing with creatures of the night – Research diary 25/1/10

A considerable degree of flexibility in recruiting methods was thus required.

Qualitative data - Interviews

The majority of interviews were conducted face-to-face at various places (see Table 3.1). Participants were invited to utilise the most convenient, least invasive interview technique and seven participants preferred to submit their answers through email rather than meet face-to-face, while six participated through social networking sites of Facebook and MySpace. Social networking sites proved to be an extremely useful tool that provided a way of interacting with potential and active participants in a manner that was easiest for them.

As Table 3.1 shows, the nature and history of participants' associations with the Oxford Tavern were varied. So too was the period of association with the Oxford. Participants discussed periods from 1988-2010 in overlapping ways. This was taken into account when formulating interview questions. Every interview was geographically, temporally and socially unique. It was decided that the most effective way to conduct the interviews was to outline the aims of the project and allow the participants to orally narrate their history of association with the Oxford Tavern. Collecting oral histories is an effective interview technique because it allows researchers and participants to understand and plot changes over temporal scales (George & Stratford 2000, p.107). This was particularly important due to the dynamic nature of the Oxford Tavern, and the concept of heterotopic space informing my analysis of it.

Relinquishing a strong element of control over the interviews to the participants was chosen for a couple of reasons. First, it respected or established the sense of the researcher and the researched having the common experience of participation in the Oxford scene – this left out a lot of unnecessary information that could be contextualised through participant observation. Second, it allowed people to reveal critical episodes of their involvement with the venue that could occur outside of the researcher's own lived experience of the venue – doing so allowed a thick description to be achieved and effectively allowed the researcher to learn off the researched. This process helped to balance the power relations that are so typically uneven between a project's participants and the researcher.

Qualitative data - Photographs

An expansion of methods was used in search of alternate ways to document the rich cultural experiences of the scene that I was aware existed, but which I was having trouble documenting. In interviews, there was a sense that something was ‘missing’ regarding descriptions of typical behaviours, activities and memories of the venue. Instead, people talked in a general sense about what happens at the Oxford. This was fine for some aspects of my analysis, but was still somewhat unsatisfying. Because of this I introduced another qualitative data source – photographs. Photographs can be regarded as a data source that helps research achieve intertextuality. Intertextuality refers to the way meanings are enforced through the relation of texts, verbal accounts and images (Waitt 2000).

Johnson et al. (2008) wrote about auto-photography as a method in understanding the construction and negotiation of homeless spaces. They argued that auto-photography helped to deconstruct the power relations between ‘researcher’ and ‘researched’ that so often favours the researcher. They argued that photographs can act as tangible resources that help research participants tell the narrative of their everyday lives or experiences.

Bailey et al. (1999, p.171) argued that:

There is a danger that analysis may fall into a top-down deductive approach, in which the ‘selective’ use of qualitative data (transcripts, field notes) may be used to legitimise pre-existing theories or, bottom-up accounts, which fail to move beyond respondent’s subjective accounts.

In an attempt to avoid this analytical flaw, I chose not to shoot photography myself. Instead, I sought photographs already taken by scene participants and asked them about what the photographs conveyed. The main reason for this was that the process of interview participants taking photos at the venue occurred outside the context of this research project. Participants were not asked by me to go and take photographs. Rather, they were invited by me to bring along into discussions photographs from their own personal collections – photographs depicting life at the venue from their own social perspective. Photographs emanated from within social and personal contexts within the scene of the Oxford. Removing the process of taking photos from being a research activity changed the significance and focus of this part of the

method. The photographs provided a means by which to access participant's subjective accounts of the Oxford, to provide more detail about the scene and to cut through the possibilities of participants' interview narratives fusing memory with mythology. Photographs provided a solid snap-shot from which to trigger discussions about people, places, events, and memories.

Four participants contributed photos to the project in addition to photos contained in the research diary. In particular, Ian provided access to a selected archive (1424 photographs) of his work photographing the Oxford Tavern (Ian also decided to assert his right to be identified and credited throughout the thesis). Ian's photographs were often of exhibition quality and, through an interview, Ian also narrated key photographs. Other participants were either shown photos over Facebook or MySpace or emailed photos (of which they were the subject) and asked to tell their stories or share their memories of what that photo meant to them.

Qualitative Data – Transcripts and analysis

Interviews that were conducted face-to-face were then digitally recorded and the audio files were transcribed into texts. The texts were transcribed verbatim which is essential for accuracy of the data. The transcripts also included descriptions of gestures and tones, that Dunn (2000, p. 96) recognised as an important factor in transcription process.

The transcripts were then combined with the emailed interviews and coded. Coding involves reducing data down into distinct themes that allow the researcher to 'make sense' of vast quantities of data. The coding process involved descriptive and analytical codes (Cope 2000). Descriptive codes are category labels – this process was used to determine, in the participant's words, who (e.g. subcultures) attended the Oxford and what (e.g. genres) music was played there. Analytical codes are themes that the researcher aims to pursue or that have become evident with correlation of the transcripts. The process of coding was used in companion with discourse analysis.

Discourse analysis was employed to understand both the participants' narratives and the relevant planning documents that were examined in terms of the cultural

infrastructure debate. A Foucauldian discourse analysis (Waitt 2000, p. 164) was utilised for this process which defines discourse in a three-fold manner including:

- All meaningful statements or texts that have effects on the world.
- A group of statements that appear to have a common theme that provides them with a unified effect
- The rules and structures that underpin and govern the unified, coherent, and forceful statements that are produced.

Coding and Discourse analysis, outlined above, were used to develop the themes of:

1. the participants' experience of the Oxford, 2. the relationship between the venue and the scene, and 3. the respondents' philosophy on 'local' music. Discourse analysis was also applied to the planning policies and literature of Wollongong City Council to determine biases and inherent silences (discussed already in Chapter 2, and again in Chapter 7).

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided the methodological framework for this thesis in addition to providing a rationale for why these methods were used. A range of qualitative methods (i.e. interviews, oral histories, photographs and discourse analysis) were essential for understanding the participants' experience and the social structures concerning the Oxford Tavern. As participation was a dominant influence in the research process it was imperative that methods (i.e. auto-biographic ethnography and dialogism) were utilised to interpret the tension between being a researcher and a participant of the scene.

4

Documenting the Oxford

This chapter documents what the Oxford Tavern meant to the interviewed participants and how they described their experiences within the scene. It is intended to provide the broadest introduction to the venue, the music scene inhabiting it, and why both were considered significant by people in the scene. The analysis of the participants' recollections aims to illustrate why the Oxford is a socially and culturally significant space in Wollongong. In reviewing the literature it was evident that there were no thorough ethnographies of participants' experiences and values of local live music scenes – a gap this chapter in particular aims to fill. In filling the gap in this chapter, the concept of heterotopia (discussed in depth in Chapter 2) becomes especially pertinent.

The Oxford as a Haven

The context of Wollongong's night-time economy needs to be understood to appreciate the particularities of the Oxford Tavern. Waitt et al. (in press) provided an account of young women negotiating the spatial structures of Wollongong's night-time economy. They argue that Wollongong has a heterosexed nightscape regulated through masculinist discourses and influenced by ownership issues of licensed premises.

The City centre is host to 25 licensed premises of which 12 are pubs/clubs: The Oxford Tavern, The Grand Hotel, The Harp, The Glasshouse Tavern, Castros, Ivory, One-Five-One, Hostage X, Dicey Riley's, The Illawarra Hotel, The Five Islands Brewery and the North Gong Hotel. Of these 12 pubs/clubs half are owned and operated by the RDL group (wollongongnightlife.com.au 2010) - a company that exerts a considerable monopoly over the night-life options for the youth of Wollongong (See Figure 4.1). This monopoly creates a homogenised urban landscape for the city centre in which the Oxford is located. Similar to heterotopias, Chatterton and Hollands (2003) argued that alternative spaces in the night-time economy involved the strategic process of participants imagining and constructing 'otherness' in relation to the cultural norms or commercial mainstream of urban nightscapes. The Oxford is an example of creating an 'otherness' to what is perceived by music scene participants as the surrounding homogenised nightlife landscape of Wollongong.



Figure 4.1 Map of 12 central Wollongong pubs/clubs (Custom data, base map: Google Maps).

An elemental difference between the Oxford Tavern and the other options in Wollongong's night-time economy is the provisioning of live entertainment. Mother (M/23, performer) saw strength in the fact that at the Oxford: *"There's music every night, there's nowhere else like that."* Hardy (F/23) thought that the entertainment of the Oxford was different to the other venues because: *"there's no where like it, like you know, you go anywhere else and they're paying a DJ to spin all the latest tracks and that's rubbish, total rubbish."*

Participation revealed that patrons of the Oxford were more likely to access the space of the Oxford exclusively. Consumers outside of the Oxford's scene tend to manoeuvre between Wollongong's pubs and clubs depending on what night of the week it is and what the purpose is for going out (Waitt et al. in press). Pub crawls and the practice of visiting different pubs and clubs at stages of a typical night out are characteristics of Wollongong's youth drinking culture. In contrast, the night-time

activity within the Oxford remains relatively constant and significant to its participants – participants in the music scene go there singularly and more or less exclusively, while other venues experience an ebb and flow of popularity.

KC said that the availability of live music was not the only attraction for her attending the Oxford, but that there was a level of familiarity with the other patrons of the Oxford:

the reason I would go there is, would be partly for the music, but also partly cause of the crowd that would be attracted to the music...and so... I'd know that there'd be people who I would know in there

It is important to recognise the types of music that participants are referred to and the crowd that is attracted to that music. The Oxford currently advertises its gig guide with a key of 8 musical genres: Rock, Acoustic, Blues, Metal, Punk, Groove, Hip-Hop and World, but participants for this thesis used 96 different descriptors of *who* went to the Oxford and *what* music was played there. These results are displayed in Figure 4.2 through the use of *Wordle* diagram in which words are more prominent dependent on their frequency of use by participants.

or what ‘hassled’ them. Hardy recalled similar feelings to Brazen in that the Oxford was somewhere that allowed her to belong:

...back in my punk days where I had a Mohawk and I died my hair crazy and dressed outrageously... I could come here and feel like I belonged... It’s a lot better than anywhere else, a lot more accepting of anywhere else, and a lot more um... open to difference...

Primarily, the overall response was that the participants saw the Oxford as an ‘alternative’ space within Wollongong in which being different was ‘okay’. Hat (M/39, ex-sound technician) best described the nature of the Oxford as: *“It was like a haven in town, almost a separate community in itself.”*

This ‘haven’ that Hat described can be seen as evocative of Foucault’s heterotopia: the Oxford provided a spatial seclusion to the hegemonic mainstream of Wollongong’s night-life. The notions of ‘community’ and ‘belonging’ that participants drew on display the concept of solidarity that Chatterton and Hollands (2003) described as characteristic of the spaces of alternative youth, providing a sense of belonging.

The experience of the Oxford

This section of the thesis deals with documenting the participants’ experiences of the Oxford Tavern through narrative and photographic representation. During interviews participants were asked what a ‘normal night’ consisted of. Brazen depicted a normal night as:

...they’d always have good bands on most weekends they’d have rock bands on, Friday, Saturdays ...you’d go down there and catch up with friends everyone you knew was there, so you know, watch some bands, have some drinks, play pool...hang out...

Hardy's response was that:

A normal night in the past has definitely been a night where I've seen a couple of friends bands play ... where I've seen amazing local bands play that I really fucking love and I've had just an awesome trashy time, we've all got up and sung and we've all, you know, danced and we've all hugged each other and laughed and jack has bought us jager-bombs¹

Robbo (M/49, ex-booking agent & performer) described a normal night as: *"you had a few beers, you saw something different, usually you run into some nutter and you have a bit of a laugh...and you walk home."*

These examples of a normal night contain practices and behaviours that would occur within most drinking establishments and are not necessarily 'alternative' in any obvious sense. This is a reflection of the familiarity with the venue and the frequency with which its participants utilised the space. The participants of the Oxford tended to frequent the Oxford exclusively, where as the nature of going out in Wollongong can involve a journey through different establishments at different stages of the night. KC recalled: *"we used to always go Wednesday nights and then weekends, probably Friday and Saturday, and I, like you, was a local..."*

Here, being a 'local' was more than just being from the area, but designated being someone known at the venue – not just a fixture at the bar, a regular in the beer garden or at the pool table but an active member of the scene. Hence 'local' comes to signify a sense of exclusivity and 'stripes earned' through repeat attendance. Ian (M/25, consumer & photographer) described the peak of his habit of attending the Oxford as: *"Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, you know sometimes I'd go down like five or six nights in a row"*

This level of attendance is a reflection of the fact that the Oxford was the exclusive alternative option in Wollongong's night-time economy and the primary site for live

¹ Jager-bombs are shots of Jagermeister (A German spirit) dropped into a glass of energy drink (e.g. Red-Bull or V). The drinks are skulled immediately at the bar and are usually ordered in groups of two or more drinkers in a late period of the night. They are a highly ritualistic approach to drinking, much different to drinking a standard schooner of beer or glass of wine slowly.

musical consumption. Participants' recollections of 'normal' nights at the Oxford included the intersection of music, socialising and drinking practices. Because of this intersection, some nights at the Oxford might specifically include: watching a 'favourite' band play, watching whatever bands were on, having a few drinks, a 'big' night out, or simply to catch up with friends. The following subsections intend to reveal these experiences of the Oxford in greater detail.

The Music

Live music is performed at the Oxford Tavern, four nights a week, every week. No other venue in Wollongong has had the frequency of live music of the Oxford. The participants recalled specific favourite memories of bands they had seen perform in the venue but also that the Oxford was always just a place where you could watch live music of varying styles (Figures 4.3- 4.6).



Figure 4.3 The local punk band *Run for Cover* performing at the Oxford – January 2008. Photograph: Ian Laidlaw.



Figure 4.4 A local rock'n'roll band *Shotgun Wedding* performing at the Oxford – February 2008. Photograph: Ian Laidlaw.



Figure 4.5 Wollongong rock band *BugGirl* performing at the Oxford - July 2009.
Photograph: Ian Laidlaw.



Figure 4.6 The researcher (right) performing with *Reason Strikes* at the Oxford - June 2008. Photograph: Muz.

In Pat's (M/40, Performer & Consumer) opinion it didn't matter for him who was playing at the Oxford: "*You could you have a great night listening to any of those bands*". This was a similar sentiment amongst the participants - they gained pleasure in the consumption of music, but also in the knowledge that there would always be music played at the Oxford. Robbo remembered that for him the Oxford was: "*a heap of fun....some of the bands were just brilliant, you know...yeah...it was some good times*".

Hardy talked about the enjoyment she got from watching her friends perform in bands:

that's how I remember this place, like the best times where I had so many of my friends were playing in all these different bands and we would come out and support them, and we'd all get really drunk and all go somewhere after it and we'd all sort of hang out together and share all these memories.

The emphasis of being a 'local' meant that there was always a high level of familiarity between the bands performing and the audience members for shows at the Oxford. In Figure 4.7 Brazen recalled that:

There was a great atmosphere in the room, the crowd was dancing and singing along to every song and we had a bunch of friends there. In the photo I can put a name to almost every face.

The photographer of 4.7 also recalled: "...the crowd, they just loved it, like the guys who had known them for years...they were just all in there and it was just so packed!"



Figure 4.7 *Topnovil's* view from the stage at the Oxford - November 2005. Photograph: Ian Laidlaw.

Chatterton and Hollands (2003) argued that alternative nightlife offered a challenge to the traditional producer/consumer divide that is characteristic of market-based forms of leisure. They argued that alternate spaces were much more about active participation than passive consumption. This appeared also to be the case in interviewees' accounts of the Oxford Tavern.

In describing the rock community Frith (1981, p. 159) argued that there was little difference in the social experience between performers and audience. Being part of the audience included an intimate involvement in the performance for scene participants. This represents a unique experience of interacting with local creativity in terms of the Oxford's scene. Brazen was asked if his experiences of the Oxford were different depending on whether or not he was performing and responded: "*Nah No different if you were playing... you'd just be on stage rather than you know, someone else you knew, one of your mates or something...*"

The participation within the scene of the Oxford definitely blurs the line of distinction between performer and consumer. This allowed participants to be active in the creative processes involved with the heterotopia of the Oxford: attending shows was not just part of supporting friends' bands but an experience of creative and cultural interaction. Figures 4.8 to 4.10 illustrate the connection between performers and consumers within the scene of the Oxford.



Figure 4.8 SC Trash and the Crowd - April 2006. Photograph: Ian Laidlaw.

The photographer from Figure 4.8 recalled:

You've got Kate there who you don't see very often and she's on stage singing with the band ... the crowd just didn't die three rows back, like it was there after 5 and 6 and 7 and 8 and 9 rows back and people were all around



Figure 4.9 Three mics for the crowd – December 2007. Photograph: Research Diary.

The following was my recollection on Figure 4.9: *“Sinking ships’! This became pretty much a ritual at our shows. Between our three front mics at least 30 people would be involved in singing this song.”* (Research Diary, 25/4/2008)

Hence lines again were blurred between performers and audiences as the ‘authentic’ site of production (versus consumption).



Figure 4.10 Rukus and crowd (the battle for the mic) - 2009. Photograph: Amy.

You can tell from the crowd all the regulars were there. There was the battle for the mic, as per usual, and it was at a point in the night when everyone was well on their way to getting super messy. Sooo much fun had that night, everyone came, had a ball, no massive dramas. Amy

Figures 4.8 – 4.10 illustrate the crowd becoming an integral part of performances at the Oxford. As one participant described it, ‘the battle for the mic’ involved the audience actively engaging with the performers to blur the lines between consuming and producing music.

Drinking

Jayne, Holloway and Valentine (2006; 2008) have called for a more “*nuanced understanding of the social relations and cultural practices associated with the emergence of particular kinds of urban drinking spaces*”. This subsection pays attention to this framework by exploring the way participants included drinking and drunkenness in their narrative of overall experience of the Oxford’s heterotopia.

Drinking practices were often implicit in respondent's recollections of their experiences of the Oxford. Participants revealed that drunkenness was a central factor in the way they experienced the music scene.

Drinking and alcohol sales are a major influence on the viability of local music in pubs. Respondents did not tend to reveal the theme of drinking by itself. Instead, every recollection of a 'normal' night listed in the previous subsections contained the practice of drinking and being drunk; overall it was combined with respondent's narratives of their experiences within the venue. Mother & Son (a local two-piece garage blues band) revealed that their enjoyment of a specific performance at the Oxford was linked to their consumption of alcohol:

Um, yeah it [the show] was pretty good... considering...Considering people trod on my leads and I fucked up a lot...and I drank a lot of beers tonight...but I think with us its part of a good show

Drinking and drunkenness was also a major factor for participants in remembering key events through photographs.



Figure 4.11 The crowd at *Self-Titled*'s last show - October 2007. Photograph: Ben Gallan.

Some of the memories associated with Figure 4.11 were:

When I took the photo I remember trying to stand up on a chair to get a better angle and just struggling because I was so drunk... the room was going nuts and it felt like everyone was amped up cause of all the activity on stage. (Research Diary December 2009)

For Clem (M/23), one of the musicians, the photograph invoked the memories of:

Downing so many beers with everyone, sweating my arse out loving absolutely every minute. Getting old band members and mates up to sing and play. Just looking out and ... seeing everyone having the best time was the biggest highlight, I will never ever forget it and this pic will be stuck in my memory forever.

The heterotopia that the Oxford provided meant that participants attended the venue sometimes just for a night of drinking, regardless of the band that was playing. It provided a means of belonging in the night-time economy and not just a space to view live music. One interview participant visible in Figure 4.12 shared the following recollections:

We decided to head out down Ox way and have a few. This is us dominating the juke box, after one too many beers and goon sunrises², just before we played some pool. Was a night like any other, were the last ones to leave...
Amy (F/21)



Figure 4.12 Participants drinking at the Oxford - October 2009. Photograph: Amy.

As a regular photographer and scene participant of the venue, Ian contributed some key photographs of friends he had taken on more ‘quiet’ nights at the Oxford, in

² Goon Sunrises are a tongue-in-cheek take on Tequila sunrises. They involve getting the bartender to mix the cheapest wine available at the bar with orange juice and grenadine. Often Goon Sunrises are the cheapest drink available at a bar.

which music was not the primary purpose for attending the Oxford. These are displayed in Figures 4.13 and 4.14.



Figure 4.13 Beers at the Oxford. Photograph: Ian Laidlaw.



Figure 4.14 A 'quiet' night drinking at the Oxford. Photograph: Ian Laidlaw.

The heterotopic qualities of the Oxford also allowed a space for excessive drinking practices. The participants' concept of the venue as a 'haven' allowed for drinking practices that may have been deemed excessive or un-acceptable within other drinking establishments. Hardy recalled:

I'd get so shitfaced that I'd be ready to vomit, and I'd give someone my beer to hold and I'd run to the bathroom and vomit, then I'd just come back and drink my beer and go back to the bar...

Indeed, it is the case that other night-life options in Wollongong are more heavily regulated than the Oxford, and this was certainly reflected in the participants' memories of the Oxford. What ensued in interviewees' accounts was an almost chaotic interpretation of acceptable drinking practices within the Oxford. Hardy remembered one instance where:

the singer from Rukus on new year's eve got a bucket of water cause he was vomiting at the bar, and they gave him a bucket of water for him to vomit in so when they chucked it out the vomit wouldn't stick and he got the bucket of water and just threw it over everyone standing at the bar, and he still didn't get kicked out. I mean, where would that happen? Where would you go anywhere and they'd give you a bucket to vomit in? Like they'd just kick you out, you know [in other venues] and give you a kick up the arse as you walked out, it just doesn't happen...

As a heterotopia, the space of the Oxford can range from a quiet night of drinking through to clearly excessive drinking practices involved with socialising and musical interaction. This again re-iterates the nature of the Oxford Tavern being a site of 'otherness' for the scene's participants.

Fashion

In conceptualising the Oxford as a 'haven' the participants revealed how they felt they would not get 'hassled' in the Oxford as they would in other venues in Wollongong. Fashion is a definite social signifier of what made the Oxford alternative and significant for its participants.

Participants revealed that the dress-code of the Oxford allowed for creative and alternate expression compared to mainstream concepts of suitable 'going-out' attire. KC recalled:

I used to go to the oxford in my pyjamas sometimes...and I wasn't the only one, like it was such an alternative underground...and I reckon they'd still let me in... they were groovy kind of flannelette stripy pyjama pants and a t-shirt...

While Ian remembered his friends:

were like what most people would consider the social outcast, the misfits, there were the guys who like, used to go into town with like dresses and make-up... but just to have fun like they weren't violent or angry, just sort of punk kids...

Hardy remembered the following photo (Figure 4.15.) as “*That fucking crazy mother fucking summer... we were all just fucking wild, I mean I had an undercut, I had a mo-hawk, I wore Distillers and band shirts*”



Figure 4.15 Fashion in the Oxford beer garden – June 2008. Photograph: Ian Laidlaw.

Ian not only contributed photographs of which music was the subject, but also photographs that he thought depicted the ‘fashion’ of the Oxford (Figures 4.16- 4.18).



Figure 4.16 Beers and Bows. Photograph: Ian Laidlaw.



Figure 4.17 Tattoos, Caps and Mohawks. Photograph: Ian Laidlaw.



Figure 4.18 Mohawks and home-made fashion. Photograph: Ian Laidlaw.

Community

Interviewees recalled their level of familiarity with the venue and its regular participants. Ian recalled how the venue's consistency (where the same people attend the Oxford as a regular night-time option) helped engender a strong notion of community and was an important factor for the Oxford's participants:

You never rang anyone on a Friday or Saturday night, you'd come home from work...you'd go get a six-pack, have a few beers, have a shower, have something to eat, by nine or ten o'clock you'd walk in the back door or the front door of the pub and you'd know 95% of the people in there and it'd be packed! Like everyone; and that was Friday Saturday night hands down, religious...

This didn't just extend to participants of the music scene. Brazen remembered the interaction with staff too:

...everybody knew everyone and there was a real atmosphere there... you know. I remember you could walk into the pub any night of the week and you knew about 80 percent of the people in there, plus all the bar staff knew your name and um... and security too...

This notion of community was a key attraction for Hardy: *"I guess that's what draws people back, that you feel special, you feel like you're a part of it you feel like a VIP at a club but it's not just a club, it's a pub"*.

Figure 4.19 exhibits how the heterotopia of the Oxford involved the space of the pub being entirely inhabited by the participants of the scene, as Ian recollects:

the only people who were at that show were actually in the photo now. Because there was not a single person anywhere else in the pub, no old boys playing pokies, no old dudes out the front having smokes, it was just every single person in the bar that night ... and then all of a sudden, I think it was Todd or Luke, just got the whole crowd to say "FUCK SHIT UP!" or something like that, so it was just One, Two, Three "FUCK SHIT UP!!" ... I

remember I was really drunk but I didn't want to tell everyone to be super still, cause you know there were 80 people on the stage who were all drunk people, people who've all just witnessed some fast-hardcore-lukey-infused-punk-show so you know people were just going to go nuts...



Figure 4.19 The participants of the Oxford's scene after a show - January 2008. Photograph: Ian Laidlaw.

Diversity and Variety

As Figure 4.1 displayed, the Oxford is home to a diverse range of subcultures and musical genres. These marginal groups connect through the Oxford by collectively demonstrating their 'otherness' to mainstream Wollongong. The Oxford attracted and fostered diverse crowds and also provided interaction for that diversity:

if your tastes were eclectic enough there was something for everyone and there seemed to be a lot of eclecticism on the part of the punters, you'd see the same people come, they didn't care, they just knew there was going to be good music. Pat

Being the ‘alternate’ venue in Wollongong, the participants were aware the venue had a reputation as a ‘rougher’ place to go. Being ‘othered’ within Wollongong was something they were conscious of – indeed it contributed to a sense of opposition to the mainstream (cf. Thornton 1995). Their narratives about the Oxford, however, emphasised alternative *harmony*, where a number of different people interacted with few problems. Ian believed that:

the Ox had a really eclectic mix of people that, you know, always got along, there were very rarely any fights, even though everyone assumed, and everyone said it was the most dangerous bar...

Hat described how this conception of the Oxford as dangerous was really a myth. He stated that problems only occurred when the ‘normal’ people infiltrated the ‘haven’ of the Oxford:

The Oxford ultimately was a pub for the “social groups” that would have been harassed at “normal” pubs. Punks, mods, bohemians, skinheads, you name it. And at the Oxford they all got along. There was no rivalry, and any fights that ever broke out were never because of them. When “normal” people would come into the pub, they’d be the ones who would be “offended” by the other groups and would be the ones to start the fights.

This theme draws upon the discourse of subcultures being interpreted as subversive to society (Appendix 1). While the Oxford challenges the cultural norm of the urban landscape it doesn’t necessarily mean that this is done in confronting means – but instead by seclusion. Indeed, supporting interviewees’ beliefs that the Oxford was comparatively harmonious is data on alcohol-related violence in drinking establishments in Wollongong’s city centre. In 2009 the Glasshouse Tavern was rated the second most violent pub in NSW while five other Wollongong city centre establishments (and an additional three in the region) figured in the top 100 of the state (*Illawarra Mercury*, 9 September 2009). The Oxford Tavern, by contrast, did not appear on this ‘hit list’ of dangerous drinking venues.

So the haven for sub-cultural and alternative types, often stigmatised as dangerous, as subversive to society, has been a safer option in the night-time economy of Wollongong to the other larger, more popular venues – even with excessive drinking practices the norm. This echoes Homan's (2003) work that argued consumers and producers of live music in pubs have historically been constructed as 'unruly' citizens. So too in Wollongong music scene participants at the Oxford have been considered 'unruly', despite comparatively low levels of violence. As the participant's responses revealed, the space of the Oxford wasn't seen as a dangerous or confronting establishment in the night-time economy to the scene's members. The heterotopia instead facilitated a 'haven' which engendered a strong sense of community between diverse subcultural types.

Rites of Passage

The Oxford Tavern is an important cultural resource in the everyday life of the scene's participants, where they derive pleasure from the participatory practices of the scene. Participants revealed that the Oxford meant more than a mere site of hedonism, it was also a site in which significant rites of passage were experienced and remembered.

The heterotopic space of the Oxford enabled formative experiences, because for many of Wollongong's alternative youth it was *the* destination for their first venture into the night-time economy. When asked to describe his first memory of the Oxford Tavern, Ian also revealed that it was his first experience of going out:

The first time I ever went there... well, I turned 18 at the end of the year, like my birthday is at the end of December. I think it was around the first week of January, I was hanging out with a lot of friends of mine that were into like skateboarding, music... like all sorts of like punk-rock little indie kids, that I'd been friends with since I was like 16... they were a bit older than me. They were going to the Oxford Tavern cause it was like the only place they felt comfortable going... and I remember... I was fully like the little punk kid, you know like ripped up jackets... and buttons and studs, spikey hair and listening to the Sex Pistols and stuff. I remember it was just like Saturday night and I was just 18, and obviously you get a bit weird when you first start going out...

I remember they were all like “we’re all going out to the Oxford Tavern” and were like “oh, you should come out”... I was really kind of nervous, like it was the first kind of bar I ever went out to. I was like ringing them up like “what can I wear?” I was used to wearing like ripped jeans and buckled shoes and I was like “I’m not going to get in.” They were like, “trust me man, you’ll be fine there, no one even gives a crap”. Cause I thought bars, you know, you have to look respectable and that... you know in the sense where you can’t walk into an establishment and people are wearing jackets that say “anarchy in the UK” type thing written on them.

For first-timers, the Oxford provided an alternative to the hegemonic urban landscape of Wollongong’s night-life. This is a pivotal role, allowing culturally diverse youth to enter the night-time economy without the repressive or homogenising practices typically influencing other drinking establishments.

This extended to participants’ memories of being underage, and being aware of the Oxford’s iconic status for alternative types even before their first venture into the night-time economy. Muz (M/28) recalled:

When I was well underage, the Oxford was a coveted place for me, a place which I longed for, a place which I knew of but didn’t really know personally. In my early teens, the Oxford represented a place of mystery. While there was no real shortage of all ages shows, the bands I liked also played at the Oxford, some interstate bands played there exclusively when they came to Wollongong. Initially all I knew of the Oxford was that there were bands there and that I couldn’t get in, and this set me up for years of longing. From the age of 12 onwards I would look at local gig guides and make a quick assessment of what the month would be like based on who was playing where and with whom. The Oxford featured regularly and to the point of frustration.

In many ways the sense of significant community that the Oxford provided for its participants can be encapsulated in the following story, told by Muz:

There are two nights which will always represent the Oxford Tavern and what it has meant for me and my life ... The first was the afternoon that I found out that my friend Dwayne had died. I had been called early that morning and had in turn, began calling and trying to get in touch with those people that needed to know. Midway through the day, after talking to a few people in person and over the phone, it became evident that we needed to hang out, to be together, to share our grief. Where else would we go? The Oxford was the only place in Wollongong where we felt any sense of belonging, any sense of safety, the only place where a group of misfit, skate punk kids could just be ... So, we slowly converged on the beer garden at the Oxford. It was a Sunday afternoon and the bottom end of town was quiet, the Oxford reflected this and quietly honoured our grief. So we sat until closing, occupying the entire beer garden, on the rotting wooden garden edging under the tree, with people dropping in and coming and going, crying on each others shoulders, laughing, telling stories and sharing information.

The Oxford as heterotopic space provided a means by which to drink, identify with subcultures, perform and consume music, to feel like you belonged and to be part of a community. It was more than beer and punk music – it was a site of celebration and grief.

Life-cycles

In approaching my research of the Oxford Tavern and in analysing the respondents' interviews it has been imperative to appreciate the nuanced history and chronological narratives of the Oxford. This appreciation led to the thought about life-cycles, and explanations of people's experiences of the Oxford linked to the passing of time and its iconic role in stages of life transition.

In terms of life-cycles the overlapping association of people with the venue across different eras is an important phenomenon. A persistent narrative emerged about 'decline' in the venue between the past ('golden era') and now. KC provided a disclaimer, believing the Oxford was better when she attended regularly in the late 1990s:

Look, it might be really boring to hear people say... 'look it was better in my day'... and you know that's a really clichéd thing that people say about all kinds of stuff... not just... not just the pub. But you know its kind of... one of those things that happen to people when they remember their lives, I think... you know... it's a nostalgia factor... if you could call it that, that the past always seems more appealing than the present.

Participants predictably valued different eras of the Oxford's scene. It is only natural that people will triumph their experiences within the space – those that they know and remember most intimately. Hat recalled his favourite times at the Oxford:

As for the music itself, I'm privileged to have been there during what I consider to be the good years. I started going to the Oxford in 1989. Between 89 and 93 it was a fantastic time for music in Wollongong. Punk, ska, art, comedy, rock, blues, you name it. There was something for everyone. So many great acts really made going to the pub worthwhile.

Of course, it may not have been that the venue has changed so much as the people recalling their experiences of it. Although intensely and regularly attending the Oxford through a key period of their life, rarely do people continue to visit it endlessly beyond their late 20s and 30s. For example, Ian recalled:

Very rarely go down there now, I don't enjoy it as much anymore, I still feel comfortable when I walk in there, cause its still like a place that I've spent many years... only reason I'll go out is cause everyone I know is going out and there's a good band, I won't go down there socially like I used to...Definitely, its gotten a lot worse... I don't know whether its because people are lazy these days and bands these days don't really shake things up... but I suppose too because I'm getting older, my tastes have been refined and I know what I like...

Ian was one of the few interviewees who recognised what most participants did not: he was the one that had changed; his tastes had become 'refined' and at this stage of his life he simply wasn't as likely to go down to the Oxford three or four nights a

week. While it might be a cliché that the present is less appealing than the past, this short horizon for participation in live music doesn't make it any less significant to local people, it is just a completely different nature of cultural expression and a necessarily truncated arc of participation through time. Indeed, Robbo lamented on his life-cycle transition out of the Oxford scene: "... *I'd really like to get in there and do it again...but you see, you know, now I'm fucking 49 this year you know, it's up to the young people to do it, you know?*"

Participants could understand their transition out of the Oxford's scene but they still in some ways felt connected to it and valued the space. While reflecting on his transition out of regular scene participation, Muz remembered how:

I had not been there for many months feeling that it had lost some of its grandeur and fallen into the trap of proclaiming that it had "changed", that it wasn't the "same" and that we no longer belonged there. The reality is that it is still the same old Oxford and offers the same things for its current crowd, it is still a place for all those who feel like they don't belong anywhere else for whatever reason, it is still a place which has a stage that is used for music, that still has the same amount of poker machines, it is still a place ... which is written off at closing but most of all it is still a place where on any given night something special can happen, it is me who has changed.

For Muz and the participants that had transitioned out of regular scene participation at the Oxford the venue still maintained an iconic status within their recollections.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has documented the significance of the Oxford Tavern to the participants of the music scene. The participants conceptualised the Oxford as a 'haven' for expressing and celebrating 'otherness' in what they perceived as a homogenised urban nightscape in Wollongong. Through participating in the music scene and the associated drinking, behavioural and fashion practices the participants revealed a rich collection of stories that reveal how culturally vibrant and significant this space is in Wollongong.

This chapter also revealed that even though the participants' engagement with the scene is relatively fleeting it is a definitive period of their lives in which to belong, experience the scene, celebrate diversity and even grieve. The next chapter will examine how the material aspects of the Oxford Tavern have influenced the experience of the heterotopia.

5

The Oxford: Pub, Venue, Scene

The Oxford is for participants a music scene *and* a music venue, both situated within a pub. Understanding this dichotomy of the scene and venue is essential for determining what it is about the place that makes it a cultural asset. As Chapter 4 documented, a heterotopic space has been carved out from within the Oxford's physical structure.

This chapter will focus on the way participants articulated and conceptualised the physical structure of the pub and business operations within it. While the cultural significance of the venue was primarily the way it fostered the music scene, in interview narratives the physical aspects of the pub pervaded respondents' opinions of what the venue meant to them. Participants' feelings about the material aspects of the pub illuminate the debate about cultural infrastructure - it reveals the key material characteristics that enhanced the experience of the Oxford's heterotopia, as well as revealing those that detracted from it.

As revealed in Chapter 2 Cohen (1999, p. 241) argued that live venues operate to make music scenes more physical, visible and real. In this case the physical space of the Oxford pub was the venue which was the focal point for the social and cultural experience of the scene that the participants described in Chapter 4.

Bennett (1997, p. 97) admitted that very little had been written about the role of pubs in the consumption of live music, considering their prominence as sites of musical production. The Oxford is unique lens through which to redress this imbalance by looking at the venue as a relational social-physical space, the site in which the participants experienced the scene of the Oxford.

The Oxford Tavern as a pub

The musical scene at the Oxford Tavern predominately forms in the evenings, Wednesday night through to Saturday night, with shows usually beginning at around nine pm. During day time operating hours the pub is host to an entirely different demographic of Wollongong's population. The 'lunch-time' crowd usually consists of business people dining at the Oxford's 'four seasons' bistro. The afternoon crowd is a diverse mix and reflects the polarised nature of Wollongong's city centre: tradesmen, white collar workers, students as well as the subcultural participants of the Oxford's scene share the space at this time (Figures 5.1 & 5.2).



Figure 5.1 Lunch in front of the Oxford's stage. Photograph: Ben Gallan.



Figure 5.2 Lunch at the Oxford's 'Four-Seasons' bistro. Photograph: Ben Gallan.

Thinking spatially about the Oxford and pubs that double as music venues was an influential idea on this project - the fact that the same four walls can play host a vibrant music scene and in different hours provide a range of different activities and clientele makes these spaces geographical melting-pots. It has transpired that such a discussion is not the basis of the thesis, as it is focussed instead on the music scene. But the concept of the fluidity of pub-space warrants further attention, in terms of the range of cultural, creative and entertainment features pubs provide.

Entering the pub, in the absence of live music, the venue's interior structure makes it hard to imagine the vibrant night life the Oxford fosters in the later hours. Jeb (M/35, ex-booking agent) recalled his first experience of the Oxford's interior:

I remember the first time I walked into the Oxford I was just like, "this is such a general place", like you've got your pokies there and your pool room there and the venues in the bistro basically...

Pat (M/40, Performer) described the Oxford in the period of the early 1990s as a: *"Mild-mannered bistro by day, Eclectic Freakland at night."* This succinct and comical quote highlights the very nature of the Oxford as a pub, a music venue and a vibrant music scene. It is clear that this is not a situation unique to the Oxford, it is a characteristic shared by countless other pubs across Australia and even internationally. This juxtaposition of pub-space is essential to understanding the music venue (in the pub) as a cultural asset.

The Oxford Tavern's music scene has survived through various periods of renovation and operation of the Oxford. The music scene was never wholly displaced by any material changes to the appearance of the pub, but participants did talk about tension between the Oxford being conceptualised as a 'music venue' and yet still materially being focussed on providing options for the pub's other clientele. The proverbial 'geographical melting-pot' manifests quite clearly in terms of the pub's interior design with the pub housing a stage, bistro, TAB (sports betting) section, bar, pool room, Las Vegas lounge (poker machine area) and beer garden. Participant observation revealed that there are distinct areas of the pub utilised by distinct clientele. This becomes obvious when the temporality of the pub-space overlaps with

the heterotopia – for example when musicians have to load gear through the seating area of the bistro at the end of dinner service, before nightly gigs start. When the heterotopia and scene temporally inhabit the pub these areas are all utilised by scene participants (Figures 5.3 & 5.4).



Figure 5.3 The ‘scene’ in the pool room. Photograph: Ian Laidlaw.



Figure 5.4 The ‘scene’ in the beer garden. Photograph: Ian Laidlaw.

The earliest period of the venue’s appearance that the respondents recalled was characterised firstly by Hat (M/39) as a “dingy RSL/pub room” which was followed by a significant period of renovations in the mid 1990s to introduce the “Shopping Centre” (Hat) or “Peach and Ferny” look KC (F/32).

The pre-renovation period was remembered fondly on the most part by respondents. Compared to its current lay-out where the pub is divided into different sections for different purposes, respondents remember the Oxford as being much simpler in terms of its layout:

the sort of lay out of the place was sort of more like an old style bowling club to be honest, it was pretty simple... still had a bistro but it was... I mean it’s pretty small and non-descript now but it was even more so back then... Pat (M/40, Performer)

Respondents placed significant emphasis of the beer garden and only really drew a distinction between the ‘room’, in which the bar and stage were, and the ‘beer garden’:

This place would just be packed sitting under the trees here...it was paved, but more like, it was more like... You probably don't remember but your old style beer garden where you could sit, just on ... the brick surrounds of the trees, there'd be a few a seats around a few tables. Pat

Robbo (M/49, Performer & ex-booking agent) described the Oxford as being less structured, with the stage being visible from basically anywhere in the venue:

Then the beer garden became out the front, sort of where, basically the um... what is it? The Las Vegas lounge is, there used to be a big fig-tree there. And we used to all just sit around the fig-tree. So, back when we used to play down there, there were as many people outside in summer as there was inside. And you'd open all the windows, so you'd be on stage playing and as many people outside would be watching and clapping and stuff.

The significant period of renovations took place in 1996. Many of the significant changes were enforced or influenced by changes in government legislation (DA – 1993/727). Homan (2003, p.134) examined changes in legislation over the decade of the mid 1980s to mid 1990s which required changes to pubs that provided live music as entertainment. The number of exits, fire-proof furniture, exit widths and doors all had to change along with stricter regulation of noise including soundproofing and acoustic reports. This legislation - concerned with public assembly and noise - led to changes in the structure of the Oxford as a pub (e.g. the windows were no longer allowed to be opened up for bands to play to the beer garden and had to be hermetically sealed), but many changes were also brought about through the aesthetic decisions of the owners. The process of the renovations to the pub was recalled by KC:

In the mid 90s the wife of the manager who I know because I worked there ... renovated the place, they let her sort of make the renovation decision...and she sort of turned it into that peachy, club lounge sort of place, with fake plants and stuff which it's still got.

Its subsequent appearance was described by Hat as: *“It went from looking like a dingy RSL/pub room to looking more like a shopping centre (its current look). The “skylight” look and pastel colours”*

To some degree, the pub’s renovations can be seen as a reflection of the class legacies within Wollongong and the dominant discourses that these produce. The interior decorating within the pub catered towards different cultural values than the music scene. The gambling activities of poker machines and horse racing were factored in to the renovations, as was a tribute towards Wollongong and the Illawarra region’s first grade rugby league team, as Pat recalled:

We were the freaks, and we were reminded of it pretty regularly, but I guess we drove the locals out ...they couldn’t really compete, I mean we were bringing the people en masse. But as you can see, they didn’t embrace the freak way of seeing. Terry[publican] in particular just bummed along in his own way, thinking “well this is great, you know what I’ll do with that money, I think I’ll put a display of all the local derby winners of the last 50 years across the top here” or what was it one year, the Steelers “I think I’ll put all the Illawarra Steelers players from the year 1994, I’ll have there photos here.

The respondents recalled being frustrated that the renovations didn’t reflect the impact that they felt the music scene had on the Oxford. The money that the music scene brought in was being ploughed back into renovations intended for the daytime occupants of the pub, not for the music scene who occupied it by night. Robbo stated:

I remember when [the floor manager] came to us and said “This is the first time I’ve ever heard that the Oxford has made a profit” and he kind of didn’t want to but he had to admit it was because of the bands...

Pat recalled his opinions on how the Oxford’s proprietor dealt with this increase in income generated from the music scene:

Terry never had anything to do with the bands anyway...they bought the crowds in, they packed the place out, bought in a shitload of money... I might

have spoken to him once or twice... in the twenty years or so I've been playing here... And he ended up, you know, doing what most pubs do and throwing all the money back into (raises arms) This! Pokies, and I don't know a few renovations... so yeah, that's where he put all the money...I don't think he ever really got it. He didn't use the money to invest back in the music, for instance, he didn't put a big stage in, or change the place around so it would sort of suit having bands...

The respondents' memories of how the renovations were received reveal a key tension of the space: where members of the 'scene' of the Oxford reacted adversely to changes being made to the pub that they had come to regard as 'their own'. When asked if the changes altered the social experience of the Oxford Hat replied:

The "skylight" look and pastel colours put a lot of people off, and for a long time certain people stopped coming. There was something about the dingy look of it that created an atmosphere.

And KC stated that:

... for a while it did, but then people just assimilate, as long as the 'scene' was still ...going, then people would still go there. When they did that renovation, that's when they paved that front beer garden... and when they cut down the trees people really freaked out, like we're all sort of past hippies or whatever... and people were so, I don't know, upset, angry, a variation on all of those things that they would cut down what we thought of as 'our trees' you know? We used to sit underneath those trees... and what they did was pave paradise... They cut down the trees and paved everything... so in that way the material aspects of the place really shifted into something that made people uncomfortable. But in the end it didn't stop people going there because...you just dealt with those changes, because you know, we thought as ourselves as bohemians or grunge-heads or whatever, and we went to this run down pub, then they made it all peach and there were pot ferns hanging off the walls and that, and that didn't match our identities...AT ALL!

Evidently the renovations were not well received - they discouraged people from coming and shattered the illusion that the pub had, in a way, become 'theirs'. Rather than temporally inhabiting the pub, participants in the mid 1990s had come to feel like they 'owned' the space to a certain degree. The music scene of the Oxford therefore had to adapt to the renovations.

The change in layout reveals the complex ways in which music and venues are inter-related. In this case the two depended on each other but it seems the Oxford as a business reaped the rewards and ploughed them into something different, while the 'scene' had to be more resilient. In many ways this highlights an important issue facing local, live, original music in pubs. The vibrancy of music scenes are inevitably focussed around pubs as the infrastructure of music venues – but those pubs were never established as music venues per se, but rather places to sell alcohol, as well as rent pool tables and bet on sports. The way in which that relationship is negotiated by the music scene determines how or if it will survive. In the end the renovations didn't force the scene to relocate. KC remembered: *"I suppose that was one of the things when it turned all peach and ferny, we had to accept the peach and ferny because we didn't have anywhere else to go..."* And so the music scene survived, albeit bruised by a sense of unfriendly renovations of 'their' material space.

The Oxford as a music venue

Thornton (1995, p. 19) argued that music is one of the main ways that youth carve out and claim material space. Music was one tool by which the heterotopia in the Oxford Tavern was constructed – the space of the pub was claimed through the performance of music to become the focal point of the scene, allowing this space to be transformed from a pub to a music venue which in turn developed a heterotopia. Indeed, the interior of the Oxford wasn't set up with favourable infrastructure for musical performance. It took initiative on the part of the local musicians to begin this process, as it was imperative that they have access to the technologies and equipment that could facilitate live performance. Pat recalled that:

You were at the whim of PA companies and stuff. There used to be a PA company up on Auburn Street called North Side sound... you know they weren't interested in helping young bands, you know if you come in and say "I

think I need a PA, but I don't know what a PA is" or something you know (laughs)...you know and they'd be like, "oh sure mate, you'll need this one" (sarcasm) there was no assistance at all. But thankfully we had the likes of Tim [sympathetic production company owner] and his helpfulness, you know he'd help you out and explain things to the point when you could sit there and mix yourself...And he'd have to come in and set it up before hand you know, and he'd be lugging gear, like the bands would help him lug gear through the back door and the locals, particularly this one bloke Old Herb would say "Arghh You fucking students!" and he'd just sit there swearing at you over his beer...

This is a recollection of an early experience of setting up gigs in the Oxford, in the early 1990s when the frequency of live-music was one to two nights a week, mostly with cover bands performing. In this period the musical side of the pub's operations were on a smaller scale, equipment for the PA needed to be loaded in every night. This was part of a 'colonisation' process of musicians taking over the venue physically every night, whereas now the PA remains set up on the stage permanently – a testament to the scene's persistence.

Sound checking and the audible force of performance allowed the Oxford scene's participants to exert their influence over a space that was set up for a different clientele. Pat continued his story:

basically you were taking over his [Old Herb's] drinking hole for the evening and he was going to have to put up with sound checks and all types of shit...So you'd go in and sort of set up over the meat raffle, you know the plates of meat would be up there on the stage lined up and they'd be talking to a handful of punters that were here and microphone stands would be sort of inserted around the plates of meat...it was hilarious... but yeah...that's the way things were done then.

Even now, twenty years later, respondents heavily criticised both the current sound and stage when revealing their opinions on the material aspects of the pub. Mother (M/23, Performer) assessed the musical merit of the Oxford and said that “*sound wise*

it's terrible...it's a bistro!" Material aspects were not the important factor in why the Oxford was a significant venue for local performers, consistently conceding that the sound was not of the highest quality. Pat described it as:

such a weird room, from a performance point of view, you're in the corner, you're facing the bar, the best place to hear the band is right where the bar hits the corner there, if you can just stand in that one spot, every where else it sounds a bit ordinary, its just a weird shaped room and then they made it even weirder with the renovations.

Robbo argued that, if anything, the renovation period in 1996 actually made the sound characteristics of the Oxford worse:

This brilliant idea that "I'm [owner] going to re-design the room, I'm going to put this Las Vegas lounge in, we're going to make millions" ...he pulled out the trees, he took half the beer garden um...the stage, he didn't ask me what I wanted for the stage, you know, I'm a bloody muso, I'm a sound engineer, everything...he didn't ask anything about it, he put this weird thing in, which is smaller than what we actually had...so its less useable...

Jeb (M/35, ex-booking agent) was another interviewee who conceded that the quality of the sound in the venue held little importance:

Even though, it's never been a great venue, like it's a bad stage, it generally sounds bad, like...and...its whole set up, its bright and the pokies are just there and all that kind of thing. But you know it's what everyone had, and because it was in the centre of town everyone would go there.

The sound quality of the Oxford was not great for audiences, and from a performance point of view the sound was bad and the stage wasn't good either. Jeb suggested that the central location of the Oxford was a more crucial factor in why it was a focal point for the scene of the Oxford.

There is a narrative of neglect in the respondents' interviews. A narrative that, despite the vibrant musical activity of the Oxford, the interests of the music scene were never catered to in terms of the Oxford's physical infrastructure. Despite neglect the heterotopia was persistently carved out within the space of the pub by music scene participants – against the grain of an apathetic approach to providing music in the pub from pub management.

So far this chapter has assessed how the participants felt negatively about the material aspects of the Oxford Tavern as a pub and its suitability as a music venue. Although the material aspects of the pub were below par, the Oxford remained a constant within the state of Wollongong's fluctuating music venues, which will now be discussed.

Wollongong's Venues

Pat provided an amazingly in-depth account of his experiences playing music locally in Wollongong over the last 20 years. He provided a list of all the venues he could remember playing at, presented in Table 5.5.

Table 5.5 Pat's list of venues in Wollongong over 20 years playing music (1989 to 2010)

Venues:	Cafes:	Leagues/RSL Clubs:
Illawarra Hotel	Aardvarks	Illawarra Folk Club
Harp Hotel	Stella Luna	Illawarra Leagues Club
The Grand Hotel	Hideaway	Dapto Leagues Club
North Gong Hotel	Faces On Crown	Thirroul Leagues Club
Ironworkers	Music Farmers	Port Kembla Leagues Club
Tsunami	Star Café	Wollongong Leagues Club
Uni Bar		The Fraternity Club
Balkan Club	Suburban Pubs:	Bulli RSL
CBD bar	Balgownie Hotel	
Youth Centre	Ryan's Hotel	Bowling Clubs:
Dacey Riley's	Oaks Hotel	Scarborough
Chequers	Figtree Hotel	Wombarra
Amphitheatre	Mt Kembla Hotel	Austinmer
Master Builders	Imperial Hotel	The Orb
Here's Cheers	Beaches Hotel	Woonona
Shellharbour Workers	Charles Hotel	
The Vault	Headlands Hotel	
Fireworks	Palm Court Hotel	
Wollongong Art Gallery	Heritage Hotel	
Project Art Space	Cabbage Tree Hotel	
Wollongong Town Hall	Coniston Hotel	
Conservatorium	Waves	

The discussion with Pat revealed the pros and cons of each venue, which consisted of discussions of stage, sound, management, location and bar. After the interview Pat sent an email follow up outlining why he thought the Oxford had managed to remain a constant in spite of these other venues: *"In truth it never had much competition; no other local venue consistently offered such a variety of free live entertainment."*

Participant observation has confirmed the ebb and flow of the availability of music venues in Wollongong. The participants revealed how frustrating the renovation period of the Oxford Tavern was in the mid 1990s – and the venue is undergoing a similar period of uncertainty now in 2010 due to ownership issues linked to development projects in Wollongong. Because of this I constantly hear about new nights that are being held at various establishments around Wollongong; but, as Pat pointed out, no pub or club offered the consistency of local live music four nights a week.

Jeb was a former booking agent for the Oxford Tavern, who left the position after falling out with new (2008) management of the Oxford over their approach to band nights (including introducing a cover charge on some nights), and began booking entertainment at the Harp Hotel instead:

I started in January this year, but it's just every Thursday there... it's sort of good to be able to have that room, like it's a good room for it and stuff but, it doesn't have that consistency that the Oxford used to have I guess...

The frequency and consistency of live music is something the other venues can not match; as such this hinders the development of heterotopias comparable to the Oxford. Chapter 4 explored the strong sense of identity, community and belonging that participants felt within the Oxford; this was brought about by the way that the participants of the Oxford's scene could consistently attend the venue of the Oxford. It was more than just a stage for bands to play on – it was a heterotopic place where the scene converged socially, and regularly.

Scene participants thrived within the temporal heterotopia that the Oxford created - this is a phenomenon that can not be created with temporary and fleeting provisioning of local live music. Venues that offer the 'theme' of a nights entertainment once a week can still constitute a threatening or hegemonic environment to the local scene's participants on nights with a different provisioning of entertainment (for example DJs or drinks promotions). The sense of belonging that the Oxford's participants felt was created over prolonged repetitive engagement with the music scene in the physical space of the venue. This reveals how intricately scenes and venues are related.

During the honours research year Thursday nights in particular became a night where music was an attraction advertised by various pubs in the city centre. At one stage the Grand was putting on bands, the Glasshouse was doing an acoustic night, the Five Islands Brewery was letting two or three bands play a night for free beers, the Harp was putting on out of town touring acts that also attracted a cover charge, and of course, the Oxford still had local performances on. At the time of writing Thursday nights had intermittently whittled down to: the Oxford, Glasshouse and the Five Islands Brewery.

Participants saw other venues temporally offering the space for musical performance in sinister terms of commercialisation. Many saw it as ‘cashing in’ or attempting to exploit musical performance and consumption for increasing profits:

different places like the Harp, and the Brewery and um The Grand, or whatever they call it now, that have tried to cash in on the music scene, because it does draw a lot of people in and it does draw a lot of the uni crowd. But you’ve more seen them kind of try and abuse it like, try and draw crowds and make money off it. Hardy (F/23)

This theme of exploitation invites reflection on Thornton’s (1995) concept of subcultural capital – the value (including monetary value) associated with subcultural affiliation. In effect, some venues just see the opportunity to increase capacities and profits by factoring in local live music to their entertainment options one or two nights a week. In essence, the participants of the Oxford scene don’t solely wish to be entertained by music, instead they are drawn to the sense of belonging and community that is created within established scenes – not ‘one-night-a-week’ shows. Jeb explained how he saw this occurring in Wollongong establishments:

That’s kind of another problem with Wollongong, everything’s owned by a few people... and those kind of people aren’t that proactive about stuff... like the Harp’s owned by RDL, but it’s only that it has a good manager that we’re allowed to actually do stuff there... and like most of the other RDL venues... they don’t know what to do...It’s weird cause since we’ve been doing the Thursdays, and we’ve had some pretty good shows there and...then they start to go, well maybe we should do something here or do something there...and its kind of like you can’t just put a band in the Glasshouse to make people go there, if you want to do it you have to sort of change the whole place...but...they’ve got no concept.

Some participants argued that other venues were only successful with musical entertainment because the scene of the Oxford had created favourable conditions for musical consumption within Wollongong, and allowed the development of bands (The Oxford as a site of developing bands will be explored in Chapter 6). The

initiative of music lovers and scene participants is more important than strategic attempts by venues to increase capacities and profits. Hat tied the existence of a music scene within Wollongong directly to the scene of the Oxford: *“The Oxford has been the longest running live venue in Wollongong. The Palm Court, Bulli Hotel, etc, would be nothing without the industry the Oxford helped to sustain.”*

This phenomenon wasn’t only expressed in a positive light. Jeb argued that the operating practices of the Oxford made it increasingly difficult for other venues to match when trying to become established:

In a way the Oxford created this thing in Wollongong that people expected that bands were just free all the time...and now its kind of hard, even somewhere else other than the Oxford, when you put on a show its hard to get people to pay to come to a show, like um... when you put on a show with a door charge at the Oxford, we’d do it like five years ago when I was booking it or whatever...when it was a touring band and you’d put on a door the crowd that came where a totally different crowd to what would usually come to the Oxford so...I think the regular people that would go and watch music in Wollongong have got used to not paying for shows.

Whether one has to pay or not to enter a venue is hardly an issue unique to particular places, but certainly at the Oxford it was an especially critical issue – influencing who attended and ultimately, contributing to the sense of belonging or exclusion that its regular scene experienced.

Ownership of Venues

The heterotopia of the Oxford tavern has established a vibrant, relatively stable music scene – persisting somewhat against the odds through several generations of music scene participants. The venue is a socially and culturally significant resource for the scene’s participants, and as argued throughout this thesis, is a cultural asset for the city of Wollongong. And yet, its status as a living cultural asset for Wollongong is always vulnerable, made so because of the contradiction that the pub is first and foremost a drinking establishment, not a music venue, and that changes in ownership

or management direction can jeopardise years of social capital built up around the scene and the venue.

Pat recalled an event that highlights the lack of understanding between the musical operations of the pub and the pub's management – with a run-in with the floor manager over record-keeping about band bookings:

Anyway the next guy [floor manager] who came he was from no where, and he'd been told nothing about how much the bands get paid of that sort of stuff and we did a gig, and when the gig finished I went back to collect the money and he says "here's your money" and I had to say "Nah, that's not what you get on a Saturday night", I knew all the rates and whatever, cause that was what happened, you know initially you'd get 350 bucks for a Friday night. You'd end up paying 150 bucks for your PA ...and that was great!!....but there was no great book on, I would have thought, you know in my mind I had this idea that there was this great book that had been started at page 1 1990 or something and here was the list of all the bands, how much they got paid and how much they made over the bar, cause that to my mind would be what you would do, cause you would see, "oh, well they bought in this much money in the bar well we'll get them back... maybe we'll give them more money, maybe not, but at least you'd know who was making a decent night of it...but no, there records were just meaningless. It was like a few dollars here maybe someone would have bothered scribbling down the price paid to this band here....There certainly wasn't any cross-referencing with what the bar tab...and that really shit me, cause I know that there's been nights where you know, a band has broken the bar takings for all time here, and another time someone's broken that one and surely that's interesting? It's an interesting fact (laughs).

This shows the ambivalent nature of the Oxford's set-up. While the heterotopia fostered a vibrant scene in the Oxford it was still never wholly a music 'venue' but was run as a pub (albeit one with a favourable leaning towards allowing local and original musical performance). The scene survived in the venue because of that

venue's lackadaisical attitude towards music, but that same indifference kept the scene always vulnerable.

A problem for the survival of the scene in Wollongong, as elsewhere in Australia, is that these pubs still exist within a realm of private ownership – as is the case with the Oxford. In this way music venues are fundamentally different from many art galleries, museums and other kinds of cultural infrastructure (that are publicly owned or rely on substantial public investments). Street (1993) argued that musical performance has traditionally been seen as a commercial venture which doesn't require public funding. But more than this, in Australia musical performance relies on pubs – venues that are privately-owned *and* not established originally for the purpose of staging music. This is where considerable tension arises in that the owners of the pub can change their direction at a whim - with dire consequences on the local scene. Pat remembered the stable period of the Oxford's ownership (c. 1990-2005)

He was the Publican here for the last twenty years, then he sold up... now if you look above the bar it'll say proprietor is um... some company called first financial or something like that, right, and we don't know who that is, somebody or other.

Proposed developments surrounding and including the Oxford Tavern were led by the Belmorgan Group, whose plans to demolish the site were approved by council in 2006. From this time this has meant the venue faced an uncertain future. As a consequence the general maintenance of the venue has dropped. KC felt that:

They've let the place go, since the Belmorgan Group bought it they haven't been paying their bills...but because they're not spending money on the place because they want to knock it down or whatever... um... they're just not maintaining it. And so its just got... an aura, which is just not an ephemeral thing... its actually related to the material deterioration of the place ... I think that's one of the ways in which I find it a shithole these days...

The Belmorgan Group has since gone bankrupt and the venue (and surrounding sites included in the development plans) has been put up for sale by liquidators (E Shaw,

2009). Respondents were aware of the turbulent nature of the Oxford's ownership but weren't always completely sure of who and what was behind it owned it (one entry in my research diary (15/8/09) read: "*Lots of talk about the Ox 'going to shit', rumours from Coxy working there that the new management want to stop putting on music altogether*".)

During an interview Ian (M/25, Photographer & consumer) recalled his reactions to the new ownership and management:

I think management changed a lot, I think the band booker changed a lot and ... people came in and out... it definitely had a big effect on you know, me going back there... cause just, there was nothing to go see...

Changes in ownership and decline from neglectful management had an effect on contemporary participants (c.2005-2010), with a general uncertainty surrounding the venue's future. There is currently a similar frustration that was evident in the participants' recollections of the renovation period in the mid 1990s – in the sense that the participants thought of the space as 'theirs'. The ownership changes have shifted the experience for the Oxford scene's current participants.

The venue still provides a space for live music, but now it supplements the night time entertainment with other performances. Different performances not connected to the music scene highlight the fluid nature of pub space, but for the scene it disrupts the heterotopic experience that the participants value. Ian recalled how:

That comes down to a frustration over the sale of the Oxford and the new direction of occasionally putting on strippers and pole dancing. It saddens people who have been there for years watching it go downhill because of poor management and people who think they "know what people want". It wasn't broken but they tried to fix it and now it's all up in the air as to its future.

Change in direction not purely economical but also a conscious attempt to change the pub's clientele. Advertisements for entertainment went from monthly gig guides

(Figure 5.6) in the form printed flyers that participants could take from the bar, to online advertisements of a completely different nature (Figure 5.7).

WWW.oxford-tavern.com.au

Wed 30	Amy Grossbard + Lillian Thoms	A A R R R
Thu 31	Jigzag	
Fri 01	Unpaid Debt + Reason Strikes + Zero Degrees and Falling	
Sat 02	Operator Please + Sailmaker + Cuthbert & the Night Walkers	
Sun 03	The Vasco Era \$10 ENTRY - Doors open 6pm + Whiskey Go Gos + Roger Explosion <small>Tickets on sale now at The Oxford Tavern, Music Farmers, Redback Music</small>	
Wed 06	The Fifth Nation + The Smoking Muskets	A A R R R
Thu 07	Ooh La La + Street Gang Romance	
Fri 08	The Conspiracy Plan + Nevereven + Tokyo Spares	
Sat 09	The Inches + The Follow + Crash Tragic	
Sun 10	Mach Pelican Bands start at 6pm + Mink Jaguar + Lungs	
Wed 13	Dream Girl & The Motorist + Dave Mutton	A A R R R
Thu 14	Young & Restless + Cut Off Your Hands + Take Down	
Fri 15	Stealing O'Neal + Afterwake + Cutsic	
Sat 16	Sonorcast + Euphonic + Zoophyte	
Wed 20	Amanda Easton	
Thu 21	Bernie Hayes + Raoul Graf	A A R R R
Fri 22	Inanimate Objects + Big City Exile + Nicole Brophy	
Sat 23	Belles Will Ring + Grand Atlantic + Savoy Kicks	
Wed 27	Steven Heath + Inklings	
Thu 28	The Go Set + Mick Thomas + The Mahones (CANADA)	
Fri 29	Regular John + I Heart Hiroshima + Skylark	A A R R R
Sat 30	Bluejuice + The Bungalows + Mirrorsessions	

JUNE

Figure 5.6 The Oxford's monthly gig guide for June 2007.



Figure 5.7 ‘Body Heat’ Facebook advertisement January 2010.

Jeb (band booker 2004-2008) stated that he felt there was a conscious effort by the new management to change the pub’s clientele:

The Oxford kind of tried to get rid of that crowd and that was like their core crowd...I think the last meeting I ever had with them was like “oh, stop booking punk bands” and it just didn’t make sense...it was like... (shrugs shoulders).

Another significant way in which changes in ownership issue and operation altered the emotional bonds people had with the venue concerned the security and a shift in the way participants perceived the ‘door policy’ of the Oxford. As a participant of the scene attending the pub at least weekly since 2005, the noticeable change was within a couple of weeks between June and July in 2009. As recalled in my research diary (31/7/2009): “Had conversation this arvo with an ex-security guard of the Oxford. He was quite pissed off about losing his job and had said that the new “mysterious” owner’s brother had just established a security firm to take over the door”.

The new door staff took a different attitude to letting in people, in ways that influenced perceptions of people in the current scene – from the venue as an alternative ‘haven’ in Wollongong’s nightlife to another ‘general’ drinking venue. Prohibitive attitudes accompanied the new security – that views subcultures and their associated fashions and behaviours differently to the unconcerned (and even favourable) conditions they used to enjoy:

They changed the security, like simple things like that... The security that were there before, used to know everyone and respect the fact that like people went there with mo-hawks... but now they've just got your general, your security that are just straight down the line, who are like "oh fuck, look at what this guy's wearing" kind of thing. Straight away there's this attitude between security and patrons and that's kind of a problem straight away... Jeb

The change in ownership and direction the Oxford is now run in has a similar effect to the period of renovations in the mid 1990s. Both periods have disrupted the heterotopic qualities of the space that the Oxford's scene participants valued. Both periods have been met with similar resilient attitudes from the scene's participants, that realise their continued cultural expression and creative outlet depends on the ability to adapt to the cultural infrastructure.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has revealed the relationship between the Oxford as a music venue and the Oxford as a music scene. In doing so, this chapter has explored how the sense of pleasure, community and belonging revealed in Chapter 4 has been dependent on the material aspects of the Oxford's space. Through two turbulent periods of disruption - influenced by renovations and ownership issues - the participants recalled a resilience that was essential for their social and cultural practices to continue. These results reveal how intricate the relationship is between cultural infrastructure and the cultural and creative practices they contain.

6

‘Local’ Music and Creativity

This chapter is the third of three ‘results’ chapters. It examines the process that led to local and original music becoming the focus of performance and consumption at the Oxford. The theme of original local music is what resonated in many interviews as the venue’s distinctive characteristic and for that reason alone it is the focus of a dedicated chapter here. But also, in the context of discussions that frame this thesis – about creative cities and cultural infrastructure (Chapter 2) – local musical creativity is particularly pertinent. A commitment to original local music is what makes the Oxford significant in terms of local creativity and culture. For that reason, throughout this chapter links are made between the venue, interviewee’s comments about local music and creativity, and the broader debates about creative cities, cultural infrastructure and assets.

Booking Agents as a cultural asset

Chapter 5 explored how the somewhat apathetic regulation of the Oxford by its owners enabled the heterotopia to be created by the music scene in the 1990s, and to remain comparatively open in terms of subversive and avant-garde aesthetics until recently. This was a key reason why the ‘haven’ discussed by participants in Chapter 4 could exist.

I want to argue here that harbouring this heterotopia has made the Oxford tavern more than a mere ‘stage’ for the performance of subcultural identities – the venue is also a local cultural asset in terms of cultural infrastructure. A key dimension of this has been the booking practices undertaken there concerning live bands. As revealed from the participants’ interview narratives, the booking agents were vital to the development of local, original, live music at the Oxford Tavern. The role of pivotal ‘gatekeepers’ in the music industry is well-known, but where their role has been discussed, it has frequently been as part of a critique of the manner in which exclusivity, power and knowledge are mediated in music as a form of cultural work (Gibson 2003). In this case, booking agents at the Oxford were not powerful agents, acting on subcultural knowledge to include and exclude bands on whim. However, what resonated clearly in interviews was the extent to which agents also *enabled* forms of local creativity. They did so by being exclusive, by establishing principles upon which decisions to book bands (or not) were based, by creating ‘rules’ that skewed booking practices in favour of local and original live music. Such attitudes –

far from being unitarily discriminatory – had the effect of creating a nurturing musical performance space for emerging local bands otherwise unable to perform elsewhere.

Past booking agents and performers of the Oxford Tavern were interviewed and provided invaluable insights on the shift to local, original live music, and how it came about. Previously the venue had accommodated cover bands, as Pat (M/40, Performer) remembered:

I think at that time, twenty years ago [i.e. late 80s] there'd be music on Friday and Saturday nights... Friday nights would be a covers band playing top-40s stuff and Saturday night would be, one week'd be a country band, the next week would be the Belmore Basin Jazz Band... and it was funny, on the stage behind there'd be a sort of big back drop of an outback scene for the country bands and they'd sort of switch it over on the following week and it'd be a Parisian street for the jazz band.

Robbo (M/49) booked for the Oxford between 1990 and 1994. He was the first person to occupy the position on a paid basis and really set the tone of the job's operation for his successors. Robbo recalled how he was first given the job in 1990 as the venue's booking agent. After he had successfully propositioned the owners to allow his band to perform there with *original* songs, other bands were interested in being able to play the venue too:

And they come up to me and were like "well how do I get a gig?" and I said "well talk to this bloke, cause Kevin's [Manager] great"... in the end I just kept sending bands to Kevin, in the end he just said "look man, you know, sort of handle it for me" and in the end, Terry Cullip, who was the licensee sacked Kevin and gave me the job as booking [agent]...so it went down to one bar manager and me as the booker.

This position of booking agent was held by a person who was positioned within the local music scene – they were usually also performers in local bands and also attended shows socially. This provided a vital passage for local musicians to be able to access the Oxford. This relationship can not be understated and is a significant reason why

the scene worked and flourished within the Oxford. The booking agents nurtured the way the scene operated and by doing that turned the Oxford into a local cultural asset. The booking agent was almost like a secret agent of the local original music scene, in the ear of the management and proprietors of the venue. They were basically a bridge between two worlds. It is hard to envisage how local music could have flourished in the Oxford without their influence. Robbo recalled the early days of his Oxford employment:

And so I made up this poster [Figure 6.1. See also Figure 6.2.]...it was called um...it was called 100% um...live, original, local acts... on the bottom I said something like “because we have brains” (laughs) or something ridiculous...so yeah that was our moniker, no one else but local, original acts ... anyone who wasn’t a Wollongong local, wouldn’t get a gig. Anyone who was doing covers, wouldn’t get a gig...so that was it...(laughs) I was on a mission!



Figure 6.1 Local flyer advertising the Oxford as 100% live local acts in the early 1990s.

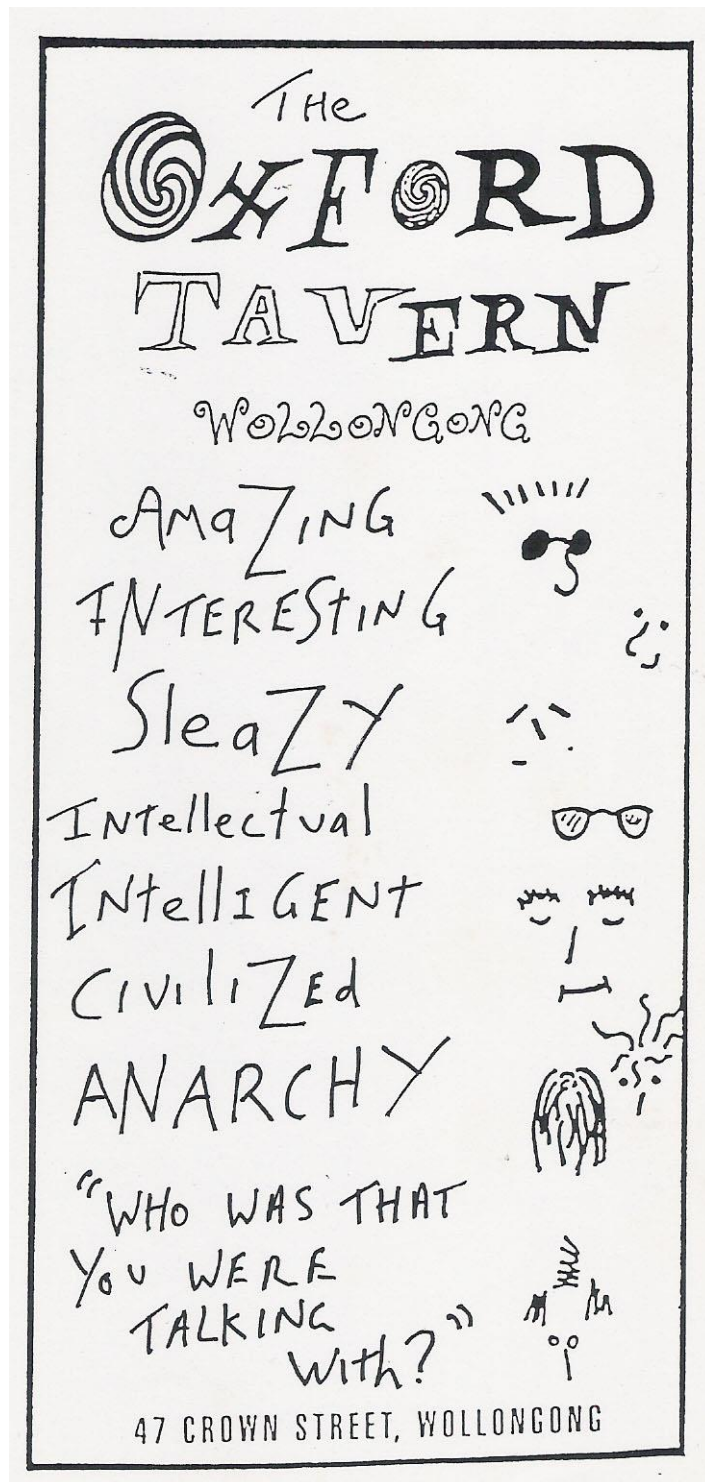


Figure 6.2 Robbo's *Drum Media* advertisement for the Oxford Tavern early 1990s.

Robbo remembered the hard work that had to go into pursuing this 'mission'. His was an alternate philosophy on entertainment in pubs - that booking local and original acts could prove to be a sound commercial option. Robbo remembered how much of a

struggle it was to compete with broader discourses that didn't consider local and original music as significant:

And it was a culture we were trying to do...and once you get the whole culture, and a whole lot of people join together to do it with the one sort of thought "we can do this thing" then it starts to spread to other places and people start hearing about it...but it takes a lot of energy and you've just got to keep doing it...just keep banging your head against that brick wall and just keep going and going and going...and never stop, and it'll work out...that's really how the Oxford happened...

This 'culture' became part of how the venue operated. Jeb was another Oxford booking agent who booked on and off from 2004 to 2008. Jeb recalled the types of bands he would book in the venue, based on their appreciation of the 'local' discourses of live music:

I always tried to put on bands that supported the place as well, so...you'd do that by...you'd know the people that were there, and the people going to watch their friend's bands every week will get more shows than someone who's never turned up kind of thing... yeah...there were some bands which people just sort of turned up to play a show and you'd never see them there any other time, and its like you need to support the venue a bit too...

In other words, bands were rewarded for their attachment to the Oxford, for the sense of community and solidarity their continued attendance at the venue fostered between the participants in the Oxford's scene.

The Oxford Tavern has been very much a space about being involved and active with the production and consumption of local creativity. If bands were seeking gigs, and they operated outside of the parameters of 'local' music within the scene, they were likely to be deemed inappropriate for the types of performance the Oxford scene preferred. Robbo recalled how this operated:

I knew exactly what was going on, you know if a band came to me on the Monday or another day and said "oh you didn't do this for us" it'd be like "well why did you all of a sudden bring out the INXS covers, you know, it doesn't work like that" it doesn't work... I was there, I saw what was going on...And so you're kind of cultivating the thing and you're always part of it...it was a bit like a club meet...

Jeb saw a link between the removal of the position of a booking agent (in late 2008, the same time period as the changes in venue ownership that were discussed in Chapter 5) and the decline in the Oxford's vibrancy as a cultural outlet for the local musical scene:

It changed ownership when I finished booking it and that's when they pretty much came in and said, like we're not paying a band booker anymore, it's just going to become a job of one of the staff

This decision led to the position being effectively 'out-sourced':

As you may or may not have heard, there's been some big changes to personnel at The Oxford Tavern (new owner / new licensee / new general manager) and basically, the only night that will be available for local/rock/punk bands will be Friday nights. (email from Sydney booker, recorded in Research Diary 8/12/2008)

The out-sourcing of the booking agent has led to a decline in the development of local talent and the emphasis on original music. Jeb's opinion on the situation was that "having someone out of town booking it and...just not really not knowing what's sort of going on locally doesn't sort of help it a lot I don't think... its weird." Robbo agreed that the decision led to different incentives for the booker - which has led to different forms of entertainment such as strippers and poker nights being introduced:

You've got a Sydney agent, they don't really care, cause...all it is is money to them, you know?... all they've got to do is fill the room, if they fill the room they get paid so much percentage for doing it and you know, job's done.

The interaction between performers and consumers (see Chapter 4) and the emphasis on local and original bands contributed to the communal and participatory nature of the Oxford scene. A commitment by booking agents to local original music gave vitality to the scene. If the venue should be considered a cultural asset for enabling young bands to perform and hone their skills, then the booking agents of the Oxford deserve to be credited for this: they contributed centrally to the creation of the Oxford as heterotopic space for the scene.

Nurturing local creativity

The Oxford Tavern is a key cultural and creative outlet in Wollongong – a space in which local talent can be fostered. Local Wollongong band ‘Mother & Son’ (two-piece, garage-blues band) were questioned about their opinions and experiences of performing in live venues throughout Wollongong. They agreed that the Oxford wasn’t particularly outstanding from an audio point of view but saw the Oxford as facilitating a different purpose for their band and local music:

Son – We are kind of cutting our teeth here.

Mother– mainly cause at the Ox everyone’s shit faced.

Interviewer– Cutting your teeth, what do you mean?

Son – Well I guess this is where we learnt to play live... (laughs) now I’m not saying that we know how to play live.

Interviewer – (laughs)

Son – but we’re learning to play live

Interviewer –So what role does this place play in that?

Mother– I think it plays a pretty big role... in live music, especially for harder rock stuff...

Interviewer – Do you find it easier to play here?

Mother– Yeah there’s not as much pressure because I guess... I dunno.

Son – Because it doesn’t matter who you are, you can play here...

In Mother & Son’s opinion the Oxford provides a stage for them to develop their musical abilities and hone their performance skills. So the social conditions within the venue can play a more significant role than the actual sound and performance

infrastructure of the PA and stage. This social condition has been created by the participatory and communal nature of the scene within the Oxford.

The point to be made is not just about the Oxford providing a performance opportunity for people with low musical competency, but how it allows the development of local talent. The local scene was supportive of local original live music. As such the heterotopic nature created a space in which musicians could develop their skills and hone performance qualities in a social interactive environment, rather than an exploitative commercial environment:

Man I had some crap on stage...we got known for having some really bad stuff...but... some of the crappiest bands, after a few gigs they got really good...all of them got good...and all you had to do was give them a couple of gigs... a few of them, after they heard... recordings or heard themselves back, they think "GOD, WHAT?!" and so they really worked on it...and then you only needed a few gigs and they'd come up really well you know. Robbo

Having the scene centred around one venue also allowed for musical performers to network and collaborate within the scene. This fostered creative cooperation between Wollongong's musicians as the following conversation revealed:

Robbo: If you looked anywhere in the audience you would always see oh... "that's such and such from the 'Merkins', you know, 'Who's Muddy Shoes'...there'd be all these guys, and all their friends...and that was what was so good, it was like a little meeting, or a little club, or a bug meeting...cause all the musos got behind it...its like this sort of community...

Interviewer: and prior to something of that size... what was the interaction like between people... how would musicians work before the Oxford?

Robbo: Um...it was kind of...if you could get a gig for an original band...um...you were pretty protective over it.

Other participants argued that, among other things, the lack of cover charge of the Oxford was essential in creating an environment for up and coming acts to be able to

draw crowds to their formative shows – again emphasising the intricacies of the relationship between the venue and the scene:

I think that was a good thing with the Oxford. Every town really needs somewhere where there's a free venue, cause you can't expect people to pay for a band when its their first gig... maybe their first gig is easy cause all their friends will come but, you know, their third or fourth gig... there are so many bands in Wollongong that wouldn't have got anywhere if they hadn't been able to play free gigs at the Oxford. Jeb

Access to space for local musicians to ply their trade with a *receptive* audience is invaluable to the local music scene – the heterotopia of the Oxford provides this unique opportunity. In this way, the Oxford is a local cultural asset. However, to suggest that the Oxford has played a key role in fostering local talent doesn't necessarily mean that the Oxford's value is as a 'stepping stone' to wider success – a notion of 'making it' as Straw's (1991) definition of scenes encompasses. The Oxford was a breeding ground, but it was also at times the pinnacle of 'success' in the eyes of local bands. It was, in other words, cultural infrastructure for talent development but also for local cultural expression for its own sake – a place in which the most successful experiences of bands' existence occurred: “*It's the thing, a lot of us, didn't really want to be famous, we just wanted a gig and to get a few people to it.*” Robbo.

This concept of 'local' music with an emphasis on performance is at odds with the more mainstream concept that bands seek to transition to larger scenes or that there is a linear progression towards 'stardom' that pervades common discourses on music (cf. Frith 1988; Gibson 2000). For many performers the Oxford can be the biggest and best thing they do. Jeb talked about a local punk band's performance and crowd:

Rukus will play and they'll always sort of have a good number of people, you know? It'll never be anymore than what they get, but it'll never be any less, but it's just always there...

This shows the level of commitment from the scene's participants in that they will repeatedly watch bands perform. This once again stresses the communal aspects of

local and original consumption and production of music. Robbo recalled a conversation he had with a local musician that he booked, who used to perform at the Oxford:

He got good reviews in the [Sydney Morning] Herald and The Age, and he got on radio as a folkie...and I remember talking to him years ago and he said “we always thought the Oxford was the start”...and it kind of might be the biggest thing we ever did, cause I don’t know if I’ll ever bring 600 people to a gig again...you know?

One participant was specifically targeted for an interview after a conversation at a mutual friend’s show at the Oxford – because he obviously didn’t appreciate or comprehend how the discourse of ‘local’ influenced the Oxford. Big John started by describing his first experience of the Oxford:

Big John – My friend just bought me here just to see a band that she liked...

Interviewer – What places would you usually have gone?

Big John – Probably just like Hotel Illawarra or other pubs...

Big John followed on to describe his memories of the night:

...There was a band on before them called the Sun Pilots and they were actually pretty good... And they didn’t really get enough credit actually, like everyone just walked out and waited for the Greenroom to play and the Sun Pilots didn’t really get... I don’t know, I suppose the Oxford can be a bit clicky...

Interviewer – do you remember where the Sun Pilots were from?

Big John – Sydney.

Interviewer – So do you reckon that had something to do with it?

Big John – Yeah like a lot of people just walked outside and sort of socialised until the Greenroom[Wollongong Rock Band] played...cause they weren’t kind of well known or anything... they kind of just didn’t get accepted...

Robbo included a parallel story of how the Oxford's participants viewed some quite famous touring acts, in this case 'The Dirty Three', who have experienced commercial success in Australia and abroad:

I had a phone call from this guy he said "oh we're coming up from Melbourne, we've got a tour in Sydney, we can't pay for it, we've got all the gigs...we've got all the gigs, but there's just no money in it, we just need 300 bucks to get us to the thing, can you do something?" and I said "Well you're not a Wollongong band, and I only help Wollongong bands" and they were all "oh man, we'll do anything you want, anything, what can we do?" so I said "well, send us a tape and I'll think about it" so they sent the tape and it sounded really good and I thought, well this is something I think Wollongong people should hear, this is like the next step along...so they played, they were just brilliant, they emptied the venue in about two seconds, every one hated them. The pub said "if you put them on again, you'll lose your job". And it was The Dirty Three! (laughs).

The emphasis on 'local' had little to do with musical competency but instead revealed a strong cultural connection to and preference of local creative practices.

The scene and creativity

The previous sub section depicted how the Oxford is a vital space for the development of local musicians. The social qualities of the heterotopia mean that the scene also develops and interacts with other forms of creativity. Hat (M/39, ex-sound technician) remembered one of the venue's booking agents that:

Not only booked rock bands, but also a wide variety of "arty" university bands and acts. He created a cabaret night called the "flying fish" which used to happen once a month. It was a showcase for new acts, poets, performers, you name it. This wider variety of offerings made the Oxford into a band that many uni students and Wollongong artistic types used to go to.

Hat described the scene of the Oxford as attracting Wollongong's artistic types. The fluid nature of the pub's interiors also allowed the space to be used for other types of

performance or cultural consumption, linked to the participants of the music scene. Dave (M/38, local short-film maker) recalled his association with the Oxford in running a short film festival:

In 1999, the Oxford offered us a small amount of money to hold screenings there once every two months, on Sunday evenings from about 5pm. The money wasn't a lot, but helped us cover the cost of screenings and also gave us some continuity, along with promotion from the Oxford on their gig posters each month.

While the scene of the Oxford created a social receptacle for other forms of creativity in Wollongong it also provided the opportunity for hybrid projects that utilised the skills of more than one cultural and creative expression:

In late 1999, we had a live soundtrack screening at the Oxford, involving the band Cicada... There would have been 6-7 short films all up. Cicada were a 6-piece band ... [they] played on the stage with a TV in front of them so they could see the film they were playing along to, and we hung the screen over the bistro counter. Dave

Ian, who made available over 1400 photos for this research project, credited the Oxford as a space in which he developed skills in photography:

I'd go down like five or six nights in a row and just hone my trade from taking photos... with the timing and the lighting, cause it was a really, sort of different way to document things, cause I'd never done band photography before. I had to learn with things like the timing, the lighting, the stage presence, the movement...

When being interviewed, and on my invitation reflecting on one of his photos and the composition of the crowd at a Topnovil [local punk band] gig (Figure 6.3.), he also noticed a member of the crowd who was a local tattoo artist: “you’ve got Todd there too, who you know, has Tattooed them all a million times, right there with his arm raised”.



Figure 6.3 Crowd at the Oxford - November 2005. Photograph: Ian Laidlaw.

The most prominent subject in the photograph, Pete (M/21), recalled that: “...*that was my first night at the Ox! You wouldn’t think I was 16 hey!*” Since this time the subject has been tattooed numerous times by the tattooist recognised by the photographer.

This thesis is not arguing that the Oxford alone sustains the commercial viability of local creative artists (e.g. tattoo artists) – but it shows how heterotopias can form the basis of interaction between people, bands and cultural activities. While the Oxford was a creative outlet for the performance and consumption of local original music it also fostered the development of musical ability in performance and established

associations with local studio engineers, film-makers, photographers and tattoo artists. This is another reason why the Oxford can be considered a cultural asset.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has explored how the booking agents of the Oxford Tavern and a philosophy on 'local' have been central to the process of creating a heterotopia. As a heterotopia the Oxford is a significant site for the scenes participants, Chapter 4 explored this significance and documented the vibrant and rich cultural connection participants felt to the scene and venue. Chapter 5 and 6 have explored how the significance of Chapter 4 was created, sustained and re-negotiated through tumultuous periods. The following chapter will now discuss how the Oxford as a scene and music venue can be valued as a cultural asset to Wollongong, in the contextual pursuit of a creative city agenda.

7

Last Drinks: Discussion and Conclusion

This thesis demonstrates the importance of including heterotopic space in the emerging debates about cultural infrastructure. Cultural geography and qualitative methods including autobiographic-ethnography (Banks 2003; McGregor & Gibson 2009) and dialogism (Sutherland 2004) provided an effective methodological framework within which to gain a better understanding of the rich diversity of Wollongong's local music scene. This is important as scenes are sometimes hidden within contested urban cityscapes, or as Chapter 2 revealed – confused within debates about connection to place or relationship to the local/global dichotomy. The participants' narratives included in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, complemented by the researcher's participation, provided a contextual understanding and subsequent thick description of the social and cultural practices of the Oxford Tavern's music scene.

Although music scenes have intermittently been subject to sociological and cultural geographical analysis (Bennett & Peterson 2004; Cohen 1999; Rogers 2008), rarely have they been written about from the subjective perspective of scene participants. This thesis stemmed from my extended participation in the Oxford Tavern's music scene, as a performer and regular audience member. I have sought to document the intense emotional and real experience of participants in the Oxford's scene. Using the qualitative methods of face-to-face interviews, photographs, oral histories and email interviews the participants of the project were able to effectively tell 'their story' of the Oxford and what the space meant to them.

This thesis has examined how musical participation exists within the context of urban night life. It did so through the key Foucauldian concept of heterotopia. The Oxford Tavern is a heterotopia because it provides a counteractive alternative to the homogenised urban nightscape of Wollongong; the music venue is temporally juxtaposed over the infrastructure of a pub; and the meanings of the space are contested (i.e. central to the lives of scene participants yet ignored by council and developers). It is on the basis of this that the rest of the arguments follow.

This thesis also discussed how participation in music scenes created an alternative option to the hegemonic drinking culture characteristic of Wollongong's night-time economy (albeit an option also featuring lots of drinking). The participatory and communal philosophy in the music scene has, over several decades now, created a

‘haven’ for culturally diverse demographic of Wollongong’s population. The scene engendered a sense of belonging and community as well as containing culturally significant creative practices.

By documenting the participants’ oral histories of their association with the venue this thesis has been able to reveal the organic manner in which a scene was created and sustained – a scene that emphasised the importance of local creativity throughout a tumultuous period of association with a music venue. The resilience of the scene and its emphasis on localism provided a unique space of performance and consumption of local music. The Oxford Tavern was vital to local music and the careers of local bands: because of this it can be considered a significant venue.

The results provide a new way of understanding how vernacular music scenes and music venues are inter-related. Music venues are vital physical spaces in which to produce and consume music, yet primarily valuing the venue alone is not sufficient. The nature of pub-space is so dynamic that bands can be inserted intermittently into the entertainment line up of any licensed premises –for example in pubs that put on live music one night of the week. But do such ‘venues’ constitute cultural assets? This thesis argues that the presence of live music in a pub does not in itself equate to that venue being a cultural asset. This thesis tells the story of a scene being created through the endeavours of culturally diverse and creative scene participants – and it is this ‘scene’ (and its direct relationship with the venue) that becomes the cultural asset. The Oxford’s scene has not developed in a vacuum, the gatekeepers of the venue’s owners, managers and security guards have intersected with the scene’s booking agents, performers and participants in intricate ways over extended periods of time that re-iterates the venue/scene dichotomy. Out of this core interaction between music venue and scene is the cultural asset created.

The nature of heterotopic space requires a change in the way cultural infrastructure is valued. The Oxford is not just another inner city pub or club. It is a kind of cultural infrastructure that provides a social, cultural and creative outlet for people of Wollongong – in the same manner as more formally recognised galleries, museums and entertainment centres. As a key piece of cultural infrastructure, I argue that the Oxford should be considered one of the city’s cultural assets.

How did it come to be so? In some regards, the ‘Oxford’ can be seen as a fluke – it was achieved through a combination of committed scene participants; apathetic management; a philosophy of booking agents that stressed the importance of local and original music; a central location in town; free access (no cover charge); and regular frequency of live music. Attempts to re-create such vibrancy are not necessarily destined to fail, but certainly cultural planners seeking to promote local original music should understand how prolonged intricate relationships were involved in this space becoming the focal point for local and original live musical performance and consumption.

On a broader scale these results call for a new method of understanding how local practices of creativity interact with infrastructure in which they are located. The creation of urban spaces designed or targeted towards ‘cultural’ or ‘creative’ activity might not possess the necessary qualities for the organic development of creative communities – of which the Oxford’s heterotopia is a unique example. Instead, creative city cultural planners may be better off conducting cultural audits framed by the principle of *retaining* organically developed local forms of vernacular creativity, rather than seeking to wholesale reinvent them from scratch. Socio-technical and commercial networks between a venue, a scene, booking agents, and a city are complex, and not easily fabricated.

The heterotopia of the Oxford and WCC planning policies

The latest Wollongong City Council cultural plan (2006a) makes no specific mention of live music within the night-time economy. There are numerous references for the need to raise the city’s profile and attract interest in the city centre. Terms such as ‘vitality’ and ‘cultural diversity’ are often used throughout the document. The document states that:

A creative city heart with cultural facilities, public art, cafes, and associated retail could attract residents, visitors and students to participate in the cultural diversity and creative excellence of Wollongong. (Cultural Plan, 2006-2011).

This statement fits securely within the dominant creative cities discourse, triumphed by Richard Florida (2002) and a thousand subsequent city boosters. The dominant creative city discourse says that cities must compete to attract the creative class by developing vibrant ‘cultural’ city centres. This is a rhetoric replicated across countless cities worldwide – cities all targeting a lucrative demographic and seeking them by re-fashioning the night-time urban environment. This creation of vibrant cultural centres often manifests in the attempts to construct cultural quarters or entertainment precincts (Pratt 2008; Mommaas 2004).

Wollongong is no different. Wollongong City Council’s Blue Mile Vision aims at revitalising the area of the city that borders on to the beach in an attempt to capitalise on the city’s environmental qualities:

“The master plan addresses public facilities, beaches and open space, parks and playgrounds, recreation facilities, footpaths and cycleways, cafes and restaurants, tourism and other commercial opportunities, pedestrian and traffic movement and car parking issues.” (Wollongong City Council, Blue Mile Vision, 2007)

The Blue Mile Vision aims to create an entertainment precinct immediately adjacent to the Oxford Tavern, but excluded it from the planned developments. I argue that this is a major oversight.

Chapter 4 outlined what the Oxford scene and venue meant to the participants. The heterotopia of the Oxford is the creative outlet of a diverse and expressive subset of Wollongong’s population. Because of these cultural assets the Oxford Tavern ought to have been considered in Wollongong’s 2006 Cultural Plan and 2007 Blue Mile Vision. After all, the Cultural Plan and Blue Mile Vision state that *“As a ‘City of Innovation’, Wollongong should not only showcase arts products, but nurture local creative excellence and experimentation to flourish”* (Wollongong Cultural Plan 2006-2011).

I have sought to document here how the Oxford Tavern is significant to its scene’s participants; on this alone the venue could be valued as an already-existing space of vibrancy in Wollongong. Rather than construct the city centre as currently lacking

vibrancy and creativity (something to be rectified by building new quarters and blue mile precincts) effort could instead be directed to understanding those local cultural assets already present. As I showed throughout Chapter 4, 5 and 6, the dynamics that underpin night-time vibrancy and local creativity are complex and involve interrelated processes of subcultural association, venue regulation (or lack thereof), gradual build-up of local musical talent and importantly, emotional bonds within a scene. Whereas cultural infrastructure can be built reasonably quickly, scenes take time to build. They are ever-vulnerable to changes in a venue and its management, but in the case of the Oxford have remained viable despite cyclical changes in demographic, music taste and regulatory practices. That this has been the case does not mean that local creative scenes could be easily replicated elsewhere. Better to instead locate that cultural infrastructure – in this case a live music venue – that already exists, which has proven its ‘success’ because it has already provided subsequent generations of young people access to a tolerant, expressive space.

A question of value

It appears that in city planning in Wollongong the economic or potential tourism elements of new-build inner city development take precedence over participatory practices in local creativity and culture. Practices of the Oxford are more important as sites of local creativity and expression than harbouring any economic or touristic qualities. Participants were aware the lowly status that local live music had in the councils ‘vision’ of the city. Jeb in particular stated:

The art gallery and stuff is looked at as a mainstream sort of art thing where music’s not really, especially in Wollongong, like they just categorise music as a kid’s thing. If you talk to council about it they’re kind of really dismissive and just brush you aside... They’re just like why are you bothering? Its just a general thing in the way music’s valued here...

Jeb also recognised that the process of development in inner city Wollongong marginalized the existence of the Oxford: “*I think the land that the Oxford sits on is way more valuable than what a pub is worth to it...*”

There are recognised processes of gentrification involved with re-branding 'redundant' city spaces in the post-industrial era to re-invented spaces involved in place marketing and consumption (Evans 2009; Mommaas 2004; Pratt 2008 & 2009). Heterotopias mean that while the physical infrastructure may be un-appealing or subversive to place-making strategies they still facilitate the space for the creative and cultural experience and expression that the place-branding policy is aimed at achieving. That heterotopic spaces are so frequently overlooked by place-branders highlights the middle-class, conservative aesthetics they bring to bear on such strategies. In much the same way as street sex-workers in Wollongong offend planners and are thus denied legitimacy (becoming invisible in place-branding and subject instead to social reformist strategies of policing and 'problem-solving' – see Barnes et al. 2006) Wollongong's local music scene and its key music venue sit outside official city visions, even those promising to value local creativity and vibrant night-life.

In response, this thesis argues that the temporal heterotopia that the Oxford provides is essential for local creativity. The space allows people to explore forms of creativity that exist outside constrictive, conservative norms - heterotopias are valuable cultural assets because of this. Attempting to 'create' spaces for local creativity does not allow for the social experience of existing and belonging within a heterotopia. The nature of the Oxford scene stresses the importance of participation. This is a cultural asset favouring cultural and creative participation rather than passive consumption.

Lifecycle transitions were apparent among my participants. For many, their narratives of the 'decline' in the venue were simultaneously stories about their own transition from student days into parenthood, from committed scene participants to older adults with other obligations and responsibilities. Music scenes are typically cyclical in this way (Davis 2006; McGregor & Gibson 2009). But for my participants, the relatively short-term cycle out of participation in the Oxford scene didn't necessarily involve a shift in ideals of culture and creativity. Participants did not grow out of valuing the Oxford - they grew out of the social experience as other factors became prioritised in their lives. Robbo (M/49), Jeb (M/35), Pat (M/40), Hat (M/39), KC (F/32) and Muz (M/28) were all participants who had transitioned through the lifecycle of regular participation in the Oxford scene. Yet their sensibilities of creativity and culture still

very much reflect the ‘alternative’ ethos developed there: a differing interpretation of creativity than that featuring in mainstream WCC planning.

The significance of the participants’ narratives, coupled with the passing of time and the fading of people’s commitment to the venue as they move through life-cycle phases, provides a possible explanation as to why the scene is not valued in conventional discussion of creative and cultural issues in Wollongong. Whereas sectors of traditional arts (e.g. theatre and art galleries) have patrons that hold long, sometimes life-long associations, the participants of the Oxford’s scene have often fleeting, relatively short associations with the creative outlet – in the sense of the long arc of one’s adulthood. Comparatively short associations with the cultural form of local live music (short when compared to the decades that visual artists, dramatists and writers put into their scenes) can lead to poor representation within debates about the city’s cultural directions. In council and funding circles the traditional arts undoubtedly enjoy a favoured representation, frequently by people in their middle ages who have already built up years of expertise and formed dense networks of support. Live music by contrast, secluded in the Oxford, may well have been an obsession or a repetitious engagement for people in their late teens or twenties, but rarely beyond this transitional phase in life. As people drift away they lose touch with the scene and rarely migrate into the circles of council support and arts funding bodies.

Heterotopias as heritage

In what ways could cultural and land use planners – if enlightened – incorporate heterotopias such as the Oxford Tavern into their strategies? The challenging element of heterotopic space is that it is difficult to protect and plan for. These spaces are very much ‘off the radar’, a quality valued by scene participants. Creative cities discourse aims to *attract* the creative class – a feature that is in itself problematic because it assumes that this key demographic group need importing to solve local problems, fill local gaps and ameliorate local inadequacies (see Gibson & Klocker 2005; Barnes et al. 2006). In Wollongong a creative class already existed – at the Oxford Tavern – but wearing very different t-shirts and haircuts to those imagined by Florida (2002) and city authorities in Wollongong previously.

The logical next step is to then think about conceptualising music venues within a heritage framework. If local live music spaces are incorporated into planning as examples of living cultural heritage, then their qualities of sociality, notoriety and creativity can achieve some measure of due recognition. However, as the examples of the Cavern Club, Liverpool and Beale Street, Memphis (Cohen 2007; Gibson & Connell 2007) show, placing live music venues within the context of heritage has in practice resulted in the creation of static spaces aimed at tourists, losing the culturally vibrancy and edgy reputations that made them significant in the first place. The heritage movement provides a potentially important avenue for achieving some measure of recognition and respect, but with it comes the danger of evacuating the space of its oppositional, subversive subcultural capital (cf. Thornton 1995). This is a paradox that advocates for local music scenes are yet to resolve – as illustrated in recent debates over Sydney’s iconic Hopetoun and Annandale Hotels, both live music venues with long legacies for alternative music, but both of which have yet to be ‘saved’ by prospects of heritage-listing. Indeed, even in the most senior of governmental circles has this paradox been acknowledged – evidenced by the Federal Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, Peter Garrett’s recent concessions to Sydney’s live music lobby at the 2010 Australian Music Prize awards ceremony. At that event, music industry advocate Leigh Treweek (co-director of Street Press Australia, representing the interests of free street press music newspapers) called for the creation of a national “‘heritage trust’-like body to protect established venues’ (Fitzsimmons 2010, p. 32): ‘it’s time that a national body was put together to look after Australian music, from a live perspective and from a venue’s point of view... We think it’s time for the government to put together a national trust for live music venues’ (quoted in Fitzsimmons 2010, p. 32). In response, Garrett sympathised and re-stated his commitments to local live music (as one might expect, given his background in Midnight Oil before entering politics), but also acknowledged the limitations of existing heritage frameworks:

I really hear what you’re saying... It’s a matter that really concerns me. That’s the State Governments and local planning authorities are not taking proper account of the urgent need for our artists... We have a Cultural Minister’s Council, which is the Arts Ministers at the State level and myself at the Federal level, and I’ve pushed very strongly for this, and we’ve taken

forward very strong proposals for this, to make sure they work with their planning ministers and developers and take into account how important it is to support live music right around the country... there may be opportunities, particularly for state planning bodies, to consider a framework which identifies venues that have got real heritage value and decide that they're going to recognise that and give them the opportunity to keep on doing what they've done up to this point. [But] the Trust requirements for heritage listing are quite exacting. (quoted in Fitzsimmons 2010, p. 32).

The central problem, as illustrated in Chapter 5, is that pub venues are principally drinking venues first, and live music venues second. Changes in management, décor, security staff and booking agents can all threaten the sociality that underpin a live music venue's living cultural vitality. Even if a venue like the Oxford Tavern were listed as heritage because of its contributions to local cultural life (a thought practically irrelevant as Council has already passed plans for its demolition), it remains unclear how under private ownership this could translate into more stable conditions of tenure for the music scene (in a form that enable the scene to continue to inhabit it in a heterotopic manner). Considering this, preservation and heritage discourses may not be the most effective frameworks for conceptualising the value of the Oxford Tavern. Instead, and to return this discussion back to the central argument in this thesis, the venue may be more effectively conceptualised as contemporary *cultural infrastructure*, as a key *cultural asset* informing strategic city centre planning.

Overall thesis conclusion

The Oxford Tavern is culturally significant as it provides a space for the production and consumption of local live music distinct from what is perceived as the mainstream night-time economy of Wollongong. The recollected experiences of the scene's participants emphasised: the venue as a 'haven' in which they felt comfortable; the social interaction that the venue provided; and concepts of 'the local' that were evident in the production and consumption practices of live music. The participants in this project collectively provided examples of a vibrant social and cultural formation in Wollongong, which occurred within and relied upon the Oxford Tavern.

The Oxford Tavern is a cultural asset for Wollongong because of its temporal heterotopic qualities. As a space it provides a niche for the local live music scene and subcultural expression. Its historically apathetic regulation and surveillance (stemming from nonchalant management) allowed a scene to emerge of its own accord, with participants exploring their own musical sensibilities comparatively free from strictures of skill, competence or commercialism.

Credit for the Oxford Tavern being a cultural asset is due to the hard work and philosophy of the active scene participants. This scene development occurred out of the creative, social and cultural endeavours of the music scene's participants – it was not a committed or strategic approach from venue management for commercial purposes. And herein lies the point: only because venue management have been blasé towards music over many decades could the space be inhabited by the scene in the subversive manner that made it heterotopic, subculturally credible and musically experimental. If venue management had in fact adopted a more strategic position of primarily promoting music (if they had, for example, invested heavily in professional sound and audio gear, if they had marketed the pub as the preeminent music venue in the Illawarra), it is questionable whether or not the bonds between scene and venue discussed here could have been formed so strongly. Scene participants at the Oxford were not mere passive consumers of music marketed by an entertainment outlet – *they were active agents who made the pub into a live music venue and made it a space of heterotopic meaning.*

These conclusions demonstrate how the relationship between a music venue and a music scene is complex. The Oxford never intended to become an iconic venue yet the local live and original music scene developed within the space over time despite disruptive renovation periods and the venue's poor stage and sound qualities. The venue was not commercially successful by launching a particular subculture, genre or band but by becoming a space for a particular demographic subset of Wollongong's population and their social and cultural interactions. This is a case of organic (and almost accidental) co-habitation rather than a mutual dependency, which is a theme that participants contradictorily valued and disliked about the Oxford as a site of local live music. The space allowed their continued social and cultural experience and expression but always retained its purpose as a common pub – it never changed its

interior to reflect the musical vibrancy that it contained. For this reason the scene always remained vulnerable there – vulnerability that only heightened the sense of camaraderie and subversion that gave the venue its credibility.

How these findings subsequently inform debates about cultural infrastructure and planning for the creative city remain unclear. Certainly, these conclusions show how live music venues and heterotopias are cultural assets – the thesis has shown how the Oxford can occupy a space within discourses of creative cities and cultural infrastructure: legitimising live music venues and scenes as already-existing examples of vibrancy and creativity. This broadens the scope for heterotopic spaces to be introduced to revised concepts of the pursuit of creative cities. How can such spaces be recognised, and their vulnerability negated and yet still retain a heterotopic edge? Heritage preservation discourses are an option, albeit fraught with concerns about private ownership of pubs and tendencies to ‘freeze’ vernacular culture. Increased attention to the legitimacy of cultural infrastructure in broader strategic planning (as exemplified by the recent NSW public works inquiry) certainly offers hope. From the evidence discussed here, any future emphasis should avoid prioritising the economic, tourist or development value of venues, and instead be placed on creativity and the social experience that musical venues foster – including their subversive qualities.

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Appendix 1: Subcultures

Subcultures literature comes from varying academic fields, based primarily in sociology and cultural studies, with a history of development spanning from early 20th century to the current day with post-subcultural studies. Throughout this period subcultural theorists have also adopted varying methodologies to identify, analyse and interpret subcultures. Gelder (2005) provided the most comprehensive attempt at summarising these key developments in subcultural theory and asserted:

Subcultural studies as a modern discipline begins as a response to the increasingly differentiated aspects of social life, to the recognition that 'society' is in fact host to an extensive range of social practices, some of which are 'alternative' or unconventional, others of which are transgressive and even oppositional (Gelder 2005, p.9).

Gelder's description here of alternative, unconventional, transgressive and oppositional practices is of particular importance as subcultural theory has fluctuated in the way subcultures are understood in comparison to or in the context of mainstream society.

The origin of subcultural theory is generally attributed to the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago that was established in 1892 (Gelder 2005, p. 19). The department dominated American sociological theory until the 1930s. As America's second largest city Chicago's complex population provided a unique opportunity to study the variation of the city's inhabitants. Gangs and Immigrants (Park 1925); Taxi-dancers (Cressey 1932); and Hustlers and Beats (Polsky 1967) were all subcultures studied under the Chicago school's approach.

A.K. Cohen would be the first to synthesise the departments work in producing 'A General Theory of Subcultures' (1955). Cohen argued that subcultures arose as a response to the pressure of conformity. These subcultures accepted the hostility of the mainstream and became dependent on other members of the subcultural group, which in turn contributed to the vitality of that subculture (Cohen 1955, p. 57). Subcultures were not just 'outside' mainstream society, but were framed in and sustained by opposition to it.

This theory relied heavily on interpretation of delinquent or deviant social groups. Studying subcultures such as 'gangs' he employed an approach that interpreted behavioural patterns and structures. This approach led to the sociological aspects of subcultural theory becoming linked with criminology.

John Irwin's 'Scenes' (1997 cited in Gelder 2005) argued that the concept of the behavioural patterns of subcultures linked to criminality and deviance over-emphasised the organisation of subcultures. He argued that it didn't allow for the 'casualness' of the subcultures he studied such as hippies and surfies in which the organisation and level of commitment was incomparable to urban gangs.

The ideology of subcultural theory would be re-worked from the Centre of Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at Birmingham University which existed from 1964-2002 (Gelder 2005, p.81). The centre dominated cultural theory throughout the 1970s and 1980s and placed particular emphasis on (British) subcultures such as the Punks, Mods and Rockers. The CCCS accounts for the most comprehensive theorisation of subcultures to date.

One only needs to look at the titles of CCCS publications such as 'Subcultural Conflict and Working-Class Community' (P. Cohen 1972) and 'Subcultures, Cultures and Class' (Clarke et al. 1975) to see that the centre placed a heavy Marxist emphasis on subcultures arising out of class based structures. The CCCS' original director, Richard Hoggart, shifted the emphasis of subcultural studies away from the empirical methodologies employed by earlier work of the Chicago school to interpretation of the mass media as a major cultural force (Turner 1990, p. 77).

The CCCS defined subculture through Marxist structures and analysis of the mass media but, thanks mainly to Hebdige (2003), also produced substantial work on the 'styles' associated with subculture. Hebdige was interested in the expressive forms and rituals of subcultural groups when he wrote his key text 'Subculture: the meaning of style' in 1979. Hebdige described the process by which everyday objects were used as a style so their meaning continued to change or be 'made and made again' (Hebdige 2003, p. 3). An example is the appropriation of the safety pin by the Punk subcultures. Other notable contributions include 'Folk Devils and Moral Panics'

(Stanley Cohen 2002) which coined the phrase ‘moral panics’ and examined the way in which oppositional cultures are positioned by society to represent an undesirable ‘other’.

Critics of the CCCS focused on its structural approach. Huq (2006) argued that the CCCS was explicitly political. She criticised it for defining subculture as a response primarily to class oppression, further criticisms were that the CCCS omitted the accounts of Women and Black youth and employed flawed methodologies. Defining subculture only in relation to Marxist structures neglects any ethnographic research into the lived worlds that the subjects inhabit, preferring to judge them from a distance in a pre-determined structural approach. Hall and Jefferson’s (1976) ‘Resistance through Ritual’ was mainly based on media sources (Huq 2006, p. 11) which Huq argued was evidence of the detached approach to subcultures.

Shuker (1994, p. 240) argued that the CCCS tended to romanticize working class subculture at the expense of conformist youth. He also argued that the connection between music and subculture had not been significantly acknowledged or understood. Because the Chicago and Birmingham schools of subcultural studies began predominately in the USA and UK, Shuker (1994, p.239) argued that they tend to reflect and make sense of a particular structural social location. He argued that the same subcultures could exist in countries that are more ‘culturally dependent’ such as New Zealand and Canada where they draw on imported styles rather than locally created ones. Imported forms of global subcultural styles can be reproduced with inflections of the ‘original’ geographically fixed subculture. The norms of reproduced subcultural styles may have to be interpreted differently.

Huq (2006, p. 22) ultimately concluded for the need to move beyond subcultural theory, further critiquing the CCCS for over-emphasizing and dramatising the divide between particular subcultures and ‘straights’ or conformist youth. Huq argued that subcultures can be understood in terms of contemporary youth culture that in many ways is a socio-economic product of post-industrialism (2006, p.3). Huq recognises an institutionalization of popular music, for example famed rocker Ozzy Osbourne having dinner at the Whitehouse or Rolling Stones front-man Mick Jager receiving a knighthood. In the same manner subcultural style has been commodified, which Huq

argued can be consumed without the associated lived political resistance that subcultural theory implied.